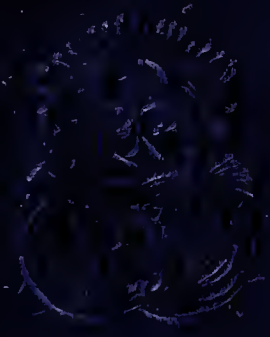

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THE LILY OF FORT GARRY

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BY JANE ROLYAT

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THE LILY OF FORT GARRY

Chapter I

FROM one of his many journeys her father had once returned to Fort Garry in the middle of winter. On the last portion of a difficult and roundabout route, five hundred miles or more north from St. Paul by dog-sled he had travelled with the greatest vigour because of the severity of the weather; and because he had so much wished to be with them.

How he had relished his first meal at home, consisting chiefly of steaming rubaboo and bannock buttered with buffalo marrow fat. Not in all his travels had he tasted food more excellent. 'The pot-luck of the plains' he had declared was most satisfying.

After supper they had all sat around the big fireplace, the family and two 'Frenchmen' from across the river, whilst papa in his rich voice had told of wonders of the East, light from blazing billets falling on his face, on his luxuriant moustache, on his high twists of fair hair, one large curl seated above all as on a throne.

How fresh a manner he had of describing scenes of nature, and how fascinated they all had been by his accounts of adventures. Pierre and Antoine had taken their clay pipes out of their mouths and gaped. Pierre Collette who had led the hunt and Antoine Basson who

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had guided boats on long voyages. Both had been many times 'the plains across', but they knew nothing of the East, although their grandsires, papa had said would have been *coureurs de bois* or *voyageurs* in Quebec.

How the frost, Margaret next recalled, had penetrated the night of her father's return, lurking in corners, around windowsills and doors, ready to dash into the middle of the room and take complete possession should the fire slacken for a moment. At times it had rendered vocal the timbers of the house so that it had seemed as if they might split asunder. Mamma and Donovan had kept piling on more and more wood until its hot roaring and the icy reports from the logs of their residence were like two demons contending. And Pierre and Antoine, hardy as they were—at last tearing themselves away from the spell of her father's rich voice, triumphant over the combined voices of frost and fire—after having been treated amply to rum, had gone out in their wolf costumes into the sharp night crossing themselves.

That severe winter little Tim had been born. Papa had brought Mistress Denny, carrying her outright part of the way, and her bundles, over billows of snow to the corner of the house, to the opening there.

It had been singular. She could see it yet, the snow blown away from the front of the house into a high wall, affording a clear passage. For a long time it had remained that way. It was curious. She could see it yet and that had been many years ago. Many years ago.

She calculated. Four years ago, in fact. A long time ago. Many things had happened since then. In that period her father had gone away three times and re-

turned twice. In that period she had had four birthdays, making her now sixteen. Within that period she had completed her education at the Red River Academy, where she had been instructed in various branches of knowledge, including 'the use of the globe, rules of deportment, rules governing conduct', and last but not least, 'correct speech with French phrases'.

A long time ago. Moreover in winter. Summer was now beginning after another winter, long, creaking and growling, as it had seemed to her, much in the house. It was now, one might safely say, summer; and indeed this day in 'the moon of young birds', to use old Madeleine's phrase, had had several uncommonly hot hours and it was still much too warm. *Une chaleur étouffante,* in fact.

However, (she bit her childish lips, recollecting all at once Number Three in Rules of Conduct) she should not complain. One does not complain. The weather was as it should be. It was a perfect evening and the sunset was most beautiful.

This resolved, and her lips chastened, though they had not moved, she continued to gaze out into the prairie with an agreeable expression on her face, imagining, too—it was a good thought—that she saw the figure of her father in the billowy distance. She had no reason for indulging in this fancy. Her mother had not dropped the slightest hint. As likely as not it would be the middle of winter when papa would come, as before. However, one could imagine and it was a good thought.

So she stared ahead of her pleasantly and very intently, too, as if she might by force of eyesight as well as of

imagination draw a solitary horseman forward to the settlement from out the depths of the plains, which, truth compels it to be acknowledged, stretched before her in the exceptional hush of a great heat. The usual murmur of the wind in the long grasses was stilled. There was not the slightest breeze. Not a twig stirred in the smattering of poplars nearby. From the house and stableyard behind her no sound came.

Was it to forget the heat, to assume with her Number Three in Rules of Conduct, to project only agreeable ideas, that all movement of any sort, human or otherwise, was being suspended while the dying sun drew over the vast tableau of 'the great lone land', beginning with the Colony at its remote eastern border, a swift running flame of brightness? The eye of a bird might have seen its effect in its entirety; waters meeting within the Colony flashing into life whitewashed homes along the banks among the trees, tinted pink below; windows of St. Boniface Cathedral at the confluence of the rivers burning as with an inner fire; across, the grey stone walls of Fort Garry, its bastions and black guns, and roofs of big rectangular buildings along the walls, all blocked out in something of a reminiscent ruddiness, that fluttered too on the flag above all, flag of Company and of country, that turned tents of plain Crees in the space allotted them near the Fort into a collection of rusty cones, that gave to the rough wood of a windmill standing out from among the trees the appearance of unpolished mahogany, that illuminated, finally, regarding southwest from the Fort, to notice no more, Margaret herself, so that her

fair hair became straightway a blushing halo—and then no more.

For it did not long endure, this last earthbound splendour of the sun; and other effects quite visible to her, which no doubt had assisted her in her creative effort, a lakelet sparkling under a film of rosy light, dark wine spilled into a hollow, the dazzling green of grass at her feet, soon dissolved. Yet she still gazed ahead as if in expectation, until the fiery red ball dropping from sight launched upward slanting rays that painted clouds in every direction many colours, until that great glory above fell in part to mauve, purple and slate blue ruins, until the whole prairie below lacked lustre and inspiration, until she could no longer see even in imagination a solitary horseman advancing; rather a mist rising from the ground and creeping towards her.

Then and not till then, murmuring to herself 'the dew will be falling—the dew will be falling' and with a dreamy expression on her face now, which was quite accidental, for it would have been more *de règle* still to look animated, she turned and walked back by a faint path in the clean grass, picking every step, to the front of a white house facing the Assiniboine.

Carefully selecting a spot on the buffalo robe previously brought out by Donovan for her special use she settled there, spreading her long, wide skirt away from her as far as possible. Near the trees on the river bank it was warmer than out on the prairie and, whether Margaret would acknowledge the one or the other in so many words, she sought to rid herself of some of the

volume of goods that clothed her by arranging its great loose extremity neatly out from both sides of her slim body as far as it would reach; sometimes desisting to throw back a wisp of fair hair that would trail away from its allotted sphere and hang in a jagged and most revolting fashion over her white forehead.

She was exceeding fair. Her eyes were light blue, the colour of innocence, changing only to deeper shades of innocence when mysteries deepened. Her hair was light gold, bright and tingling, inclined to be the sport of every random gust, though so severely confined at the nape of her neck by a large bow of ribbon. Her skin was 'as the lily's' to quote the rector, who was horticulturally inclined, 'except where petals of faintest rose unfolded dewily in her cheeks'. If any such authority were needed? No one but could see with his own eyes how blonde a flower was Margaret, most noticeable too in a settlement where 'pale faces' in the exact sense were in the minority; how small and delicate her hands, butterflies, spirituelle almost as those 'souls of summer hours', how fresh, clean and whole her calico gown of fine weave; how closely embroidered and snugly fitting her unspotted moccasins, of softest and whitest deer skin.

And while noticing, one might also have observed with ease the contrast between her and Donovan, next to her in years, in these latter respects, for the clothing on his long, rangy body stretched out on the raw ground nearby might have been disregarded as clothing at all. In spots it appeared as a jumble of rags, in many other spots it did not appear. One shoulder was quite bare, covered only as a large part of his arms and legs, as his

entire face, with freckles. And his hair while it resembled Margaret's somewhat in colour resembled still more a network of sandy burrs; and was quite as uncombed, teasled and dusty as the coat of the old dog lying cosily beside him, both breathing evenly in the calm sleep of healthy brutes.

And three other boys, familiarly, Pat, Rob and Tim, eight, six and four, had feet as bare and bodies as scantily clad as Don. Sun and air had made them similarly strong and homely, and as their much larger brother they were unconcerned with the matter, but with another, were intent rather on the arrows they were aiming from their bows into an old stump in the foreground. When a winged dart would strike the target they would emit sharp exclamations of glee; then look back anxiously at their mother, sitting on a chair behind them, and seeing her inattentive, return to their game.

From time to time, nicely distributed on her robe, Margaret too was studying her mother, but with much less satisfaction. From the partly closed eyes, the rough hands embedded in her lap as in a final quietus, from the grooves about her mouth, from the bulging of her white kerchief as her head drooped forward slightly, from her sagging patched gown—her heavy brown hair coiled low over her ears had its usual gloss and moulding—Margaret derived no certain conclusion on anything, no answer to the mystery suggested in her mother, especially during these periods of abject relaxation.

Turning away Margaret probed this mystery, this and other unexplained things, her own aimless life, as she probed the shadows beneath the trees, a dull mixture

too, formless and shifting, whose only extenuating quality—seeking again a rule of content—was that they were not completely opaque. One could reject them entirely, and looking through them unseeingly find the river, a smooth, satisfying plane. There, on the glazed surface of the familiar current, high at this time of the year, Margaret's eyes rested for some minutes, with mild gratitude in the mere resting. Then when she had been regarding one patch of water for quite a long time, it rippled into cunning little waves, making quite an agreeable variety. And another patch caught a handsome light from the sky, from an opal interval in the clouds. And there! Her attention swept suddenly to the end of vision. A surprise! If she had not been seated on the ground and established on the robe as she was established she could not, she was sure, have seen this touch of colour at all. An orange-dyed canoe, shooting into sight and vanishing. A tiny shallop, in its vivid stain and in its swiftness a mere flash in a shining pan of water, but a most cheering flash. Margaret's eyes snatching at every crumb of glamour, brightened for the moment; then returned to the water nearer at hand and rested there once more softly glistening; again somewhat wistfully.

In the more populous parts of the settlement, nearer the Fort perhaps, there would be many such gaily painted boats on the river. In the absence of a bridge, 'dug-outs' as they properly were and a rude ferry were the only means of crossing in open water. On fine summer evenings they would weave back and forth in considerable numbers, shuttles, securing the basic threads of the Colony—Indian blood, in three fourths of the

population of 10,000—irrespectively of creed or language. Strong little shuttles, weaving a friendly, an amorous, or merely a useful cloth. Several hours ago Harry, who worked for the Moores, had left his home upstream in just such a tiny, bright dug-out as the one glimpsed by Margaret. The only one.

Their home was not in the populous part of the long settlement strung out for fifteen miles along the rivers. A large tract of virgin land separated them from the MacElherans on the left on the same sward, Scottish half-breeds and farmers; and on the right a similar tract of virgin land separated them from the widow Denny.

Their nearest and best neighbours were the French half-breeds across the river, whose thatched dwellings, visible only as fluttering notes through wild-growing maples, oaks and elms on either bank were, Margaret knew if she could not at all verify by actual observation, practically deserted.

In one there would be it is true (she recalled this pensively), the invalid Louis Basson (father of Antoine, himself a grandfather) and Julie his wife. Years ago during the chase Louis had been thrown from his horse and so seriously injured that he had lain on his back ever since on an old sled covered with skins. On days when he was well enough he made whips by plaiting together thongs of red deer skin.

Louis would be inside and Julie caring for him.

But the only signs of life outside the cluster of half-breed lodges or anywhere were old Jacques Collette (father of Pierre, himself a grandfather) at the door smoking kinnikinnic and old Madeleine, his squaw,

down at the river's lip, dipping a garment lazily in and out of the water.

Both Bassons and Collettes had a profusion of sons and daughters and a still greater profusion of grandsons and grand-daughters, but some weeks ago the greater part of them had gone to hunt buffalo on the plains, and even before, as soon as the ice had left the rivers Basson and Collette men, young and mature, had departed 'upon the voyage'.

It would be lively when they were home again. The music of violins would float across the water at night. Margaret would hear it and the shuffling feet—while she lay in bed. For she had never attended any of the frolics of their laughter-loving, philharmonic neighbours —although in dark *Métis* eyes, in their songs ('in collaboration with the sun and air and rippling rapids' the rector said 'they created their own boating songs') in their dancing——?

For a moment, for the first time some new feeling brushed up against Margaret, then vanished—in the haze veiling the river, the trees, the banks—in the peace of the neighbourhood. Her mother's figure now, in the dimness, suggested less congealed turbulence, greater repose. Don's sleep was calming as well as the restful postures of Pat, Rob and Tim, drooping to slumber, all three having at last relinquished archery and exclamations.

Old Luke, the dog was asleep, too, only once rising therefrom and questing the air with his nose, then when reassured that no foreign scent had invaded the pure home atmosphere, lying down again. A bird in a tree

chirping timidly, a grunt issuing from the stableyard, a gold-eye tinkling the surface of the river. These the only sounds. And old Madeleine to be sure still dipping her garment in and out of the water—producing that faint chiming sound that seemed forever to caress the peace of the neighbourhood.

Chapter II

EVER since Margaret could remember, her father had been journeying hither and thither. Many in the settlement, the hunters especially, roamed a great deal, but her father had gone farther and was usually absent longer than anyone else.

Eight times he had crossed 'the Atlantic main', as he spoke of it in his big rolling tones. One could see the ship tossing on the waves.

Once he had gone into Canada, a distant country in the East ruled by the same sovereign who ruled Prince Rupert's land, Queen Victoria, superior in authority even to the Governor of the Hudson Bay. As a result of the visit to Canada, papa had formed a favourable impression of that quarter of the world. In parts, he had said, the climate was as soft as that of Ireland. And he had fetched home with him some rosy fruit of delicious flavour, called apples, a fruit which none of the children had ever tasted before. Indeed for a time papa had wished to remove into Canada, but mamma had refused. She did not wish, she said, to go out of the world altogether.

And it was a long journey, however accomplished. The route through the United States with all its disadvantages was preferable to the route by Lake Superior. On the latter, large row boats or canoes were used, which it was necessary to carry around a great number of rapids

and falls, through forests and over rocks, to *portage* as the French said. In going to Canada papa had travelled by the well-worn prairie path to St. Paul in a long train of ox-carts laden with furs. St. Paul was in advance of Fort Garry. Running along the roadways were high, dry paths formed of boards, for the sole use of pedestrians. From that seat of modernity papa had travelled to a still greater seat of modernity, Detroit, by stage, by steamboat and a short distance by a train of heavy vehicles, pushed by steam, a new means of locomotion which he had disliked even more than travelling by steamboat.

Another time when he had gone to New York he had been obliged to deliver himself over to this tortuous mode of travel, by steam train that is, even more extensively. New York he had found so immense as to defy description. Gifted as papa was in this respect he had not attempted it. All he had seemed to remember was 'the thunder of omnibuses on Broadway', and he had been relieved when able to depart from a gathering of omnibuses and animation such as he had not seen nor heard in any other city in the world.

He much preferred 'the tractless wilds', he said, 'and the pot-luck of the plains'.

And it was into the far West he had gone last summer, leaving in August 'at the summit of agriculture', as mamma had said repeatedly since.

Which was mamma's manner of expression, merely. For until after papa's departure there had been no extent of cultivation on their strip of land which, as all the others, ran back two miles from the river. Since

papa's last departure, however, Donovan had prepared a larger portion of land to which he had committed early this spring the precious seed obtained from Angus Currie, the seed of wheat. The same prosperous friend, a merchant as well as a farmer on the other river, the Red, had sold them implements of husbandry on which payments were to be made.

In papa's absence Angus Currie assisted them greatly with advice and goods. Doubtless now they would progress much better, now, too, that Don had grown so much bigger and was able to do so much more.

The wheat sproutings were well above the ground; and all were greatly encouraged.

——But what had she been thinking about, Margaret, suspecting herself of wandering, enquired of the river, in which direction she still gazed. 'What was I thinking about—what was I thinking about?' she asked it silently. But the river growing quite grey, curtained as it was by many clouds but for which twilight at this time of the year would have lasted much longer, was not responding very well, and, the dimming waters refusing to give her the proper sequence of her reminiscences, she allowed herself to sit almost without thought, immersed in her own clouds, in which it was so difficult to see any brightness, any law or order—until something physical from without precipitated another question: Why were they not going indoors? It must be late. Her mother had not stirred. Patrick and Robert, twin lumps on the grass, were far on in their dreams. With a cuddling smile and shut eyes Timothy had drawn himself over to the buffalo robe, as near to Margaret as a muddy small brother dare

approach an immaculate sister, and now quaffed softly some simple balm. Don, too, slumbered on. He might as well all this time have been in his bed. Better. Fatigued as he was with much toil.

It must be growing late. Old Jacques *de l'autrecôte de la rivière* could no longer be seen. Nor Madeleine. Nor heard.

There was a mystery about Madeleine, too. She refused to go to church, the Roman Catholic, with her family. Mamma said that she worshipped idols, and it was true that Madeleine, who was very old, had had for many years something wrapped in a piece of red flannel to which she was devoted. No one had ever seen it and no one knew what it was. It was curious. It had something to do, that much was certain, with Madeleine's past, before she had married Jacques even, when with her tribe *libre comme l'air* she had roamed the wilds under the great and good skies 'Kichie—Kisek—Kouch'. (Madeleine sometimes spoke French of a sort, again in the same sentence, Indian or broken English). But she was singularly silent about that past. She was silent about everything.

Mamma too was silent—silent about everything. But there was a difference in their silences. Madeleine's was that of her race. It had in it something both stolid and sad. Mamma's silence was more personal. Frequently it was acute and passionate.

On the whole it was a world of silence, of obscurities. And in her own mind were so many dim wisps, wandering pieces that never could be made into anything. When she tried to do anything with them they lost form

entirely and fell back into the silence which had contained them. It would be satisfying if all these obscurities would resolve themselves into recognizable pieces, if all of living, for that matter, could be arranged in some good design; even as at present while sitting on the ground, her eyes bent in the direction of the darkening river, she still kept spreading her voluminous skirt away from her in folds as even as possible so that the final effect would be a large and pleasing fan.

It was not difficult in the case of a skirt. Nor was it difficult on the whole to order one's conduct. What one did every hour of the day could be planned and executed. Days of the week could be set aside for various purposes and so observed. It was not difficult to place the furnishings of one's room in convenient fixed places. But other things, happenings, conversations, stray remarks, objects in their ways as actual as candles, one could do nothing with. Could place nowhere nor receive any light therefrom. In fact when one took them into one's mind and moved them slowly about with the idea of evolving something, nothing but the darkest muddle resulted.

Some bits of talk, of course, after all, might be of trifling importance, bits addressed by her parents to each other that seemed black and ominous at the time; and those restrained conversations—she might be surprised at their insignificance.

So why disturb oneself?

Repeatedly she used this argument, yet some things would not be dismissed. Not that she had any great thirst for news—and she certainly used no guile to ob-

tain information, perhaps easily obtained—yet she was always, in spite of rules and self-counsel of content, disquieted by her parents' quarrels. Not only that, the longing to have some pattern in all the affairs of existence was as natural to her as the desire to arrange her skirt in the shape of a fan.

Some of her parents' conversations were, of course, quite colourless. That is, for days they would be colourless; then suddenly she would realize that they were restrained rather than colourless. Still she could make nothing of them. She would gather words up in her memory as nearly as possible as they had been spoken and from them try to weave something sensible, both because of a strong weaving tendency and because the restraint exhibited made her unhappy.

Thus far her weaving had been unsuccessful, and who 'he' was, who cropped up so frequently in her parents' speech, a most carefully guarded 'he', was the greatest mystery. It was curious that they could talk about him so much and yet say nothing, give no clue whatever to his identity. She had thought of every man and boy in the settlement and had rejected each in turn. She wondered if 'he' lived elsewhere. There was little to indicate that. Indeed 'he', the word, though referring to a person without a name, without dimensions, qualities or occupation that she could discover, neither tall nor short, neither serious nor gay, neither hunter, fisherman, farmer nor *voyageur,* not employed in any way by the Company, was itself the liveliest word in their conversations concerning the person. All other words were so pale, so baffling in their pallor and lack of body. She

could not in fact, try as she would, remember any of them.

And this was all the more noticeable since in conversation in general there were words and phrases of her parents that had body and colour and had been so often repeated that she could not forget them, such as papa's 'pot-luck of the plains' and mamma's 'one of the first families'. It was easy enough to guess indeed that her mother planned her to marry into 'one of the first families' of the settlement. That explained so much; why she, alone of all the family, was never allowed to soil herself in any way, why her brothers were taught to wait on her and to speak to her with respect, why in consideration all told of one hundred bags of potatoes she had been educated at the Academy presided over by Mistress Toll, a most accomplished gentlewoman, in company with Fanny Currie and her half-sister, Simone Laflamme, and other daughters of first families, all connected with the Hudson Bay Company, some daughters of men who after many years of service at distant posts had retired to the culture and comfort of Fort Garry.

It was evidently her mother's intention (as far as she could see her father had no intention whatever in the matter) that she should marry into one of these families. So far so good. But if her mother had selected the actual person, as it sometimes seemed, Margaret neither liked the actual person, Colin Currie, eldest son and heir of Angus Currie, their chief benefactor, nor saw the need of all this preparation on his own particular account. Colin was——

But no, she would not say it, even to herself. One did

not criticize. It was not proper to criticize—but why, one might perhaps question the air, particularly a dark, silent air, without transgressing any of Mrs. Toll's precepts, was Colin Currie not being subjected to some such preparation as herself? It might not be necessary for him to have just such a 'drawing-room education' (mamma's expression) as hers, but, as he was, he would not make a suitable husband for her. She could at least breathe that —to the air.

Unblushingly to the air, she breathed, 'Colin Currie would not make a suitable husband for me.' Growing in daring, breathed it again, almost whispered it. 'Colin Currie would not make a suitable husband for me.'

Then waiting, shivered, for astonishingly at the moment a breeze drove by her, administering a chill blow. She shivered again, felt corrected, for being critical in any manner, in the slightest manner; though not realizing at all how critical she had been of the very foundation of society, not realizing at all how she of all persons, meek, gentle, obedient to the last degree, must have astounded, discomposed and disturbed the ether of her day by advancing on it, even by implication, the theory that young men should be trained for matrimony, an advanced theory seventy years later—if it be a theory?

No wonder there was a breeze, no wonder the air had all at once become so cool.

Margaret turned around again to her mother, urgently. If she did not realize the enormity of her daring, she did at least feel suddenly chilled and thought of going inside, but she experienced an unusual fear of entering the dark house alone.

It was time to go inside, but mamma must have quite forgotten. Usually she was most anxious that Margaret should be protected from the dews, and the dews must have been falling for some time. There was a dampness as well as a chill. The atmosphere had become in every way uncharitable, even tainted. The fragrance of plum blossoms, many on the ground like snow, of cherry blossoms and other wild bloomings on the slopes, was drifting away and the odour of smoked skins, a common odour in the Colony, issuing from every home where peltries were bed coverings, body coverings, chair coverings, an odour of which Margaret was not ordinarily sensible now came to her in noticeable gusts, with an odd whiff now and again of stale meat such as emanated from the person of Harry at times.

To rid herself of this, intuitively Margaret rose and walked farther out into the open, to the side of the house; then, when out there, the superlative sweetness of the hawthorns, flowers was brought to her on a still cooler current of air, contrarily or not, she noticed less the sweetness than the coolness.

The weather was changing. It was becoming colder. It was going to rain—or snow? It had been known to snow in June. Certainly this breeze was not as agreeable as in the private recesses of her heart she had imagined during the heat it would be. And there were no stars, no moon. The sky was gone, practically. It was inky black around. The river was gone, its spirit, with which she so often communed, had now no mood for her purpose. Blackest night engorged it, the banks, the trees, the houses across the way. This sudden change

combined with total darkness was nature's reprimand. She had been thinking most unkind things of Colin Currie, she had recalled his appearance with disgust even—and there was no need, there might at least be no need. Only once had her mother made the remark which had given Margaret the idea that he was the actual person whom her mother intended her to marry.

Only once. Out of that one remark and perhaps a look Margaret had been able to make a slight pattern, that rare thing; the only pattern she had ever evolved from the speech of her elders and it was not all a pleasing pattern. She may have been wrong. She had jumped to it, to be sure. It had come to her with a bound of alarm for which there was doubtless no reason.

Still she shivered. If all would rouse and go inside! They were all, her mother and her brothers, asleep; and in their sleep and in the darkness remote. She wanted the feeling of home itself, but that and all the soothing of night were slipping from her in spite of herself. She looked prairieward where so often the dream of far-off spaces guarding a beloved parent intrigued her, and there was nothing but chill darkness, piled on darkness, out of which came the sudden and dismal notes of a conjurer's drum from a band of Indians, pressing in on her the darkness and the sullen negation of the great lone land.

In a swift loneliness amounting almost to childish terror she walked towards her mother to awaken her.

But her mother stood up before she reached her, abruptly—Margaret uttered a slight scream, then was immediately assured by her mother's voice, husky, for

once, as with warm memories. Had her mother not been asleep after all, but pondering deeply on something delightful? That amazing inflection was in her voice.

'Come, come Tim, Patrick, Robert, everyone.' Going over to Donovan she prodded him with her foot. 'Rouse now, Donovan, rouse, I say.'

Donovan came to his feet, stretching himself. 'Go—shut up—Luke,' he grunted sleepily and departed towards the rear with the dog.

Taking the chair on which she had been sitting, Elizabeth Moore, tall, spare, big-boned with a stately stride advanced towards the open front door, followed by Margaret and three small boys not quite awake.

Barely inside the tall woman uttered a cry and let the chair fall.

Coiled on the floor was something.

'You here yet. YOU,' she shouted. 'Straightway be gone. Be gone, I say.'

The prone figure, the figure of Harry, uncoiled, rose, shook out a mass of dark hair, cast a flaming glance at Margaret and then with a furtive laugh leapt outside.

Elizabeth Moore clapped the heavy door shut solidly behind him. 'The impudence,' she breathed in a fierce undertone. 'The impudence.' Then her bosom heaving, her nostrils expanding, she swerved around.

'Get to your beds, I say, everyone.'

Patrick, Robert and Timothy all hastened out of sight—and Margaret, more slowly.

Chapter III

STUNNED, Margaret went to her room and sat down on her bed, from where she could see her mother standing at the open door, very still. Something had happened. The stone wall of her mother's silence had fallen, crashing instantly to the ground with dull thud. Then nothing. No further sounds, no echo, no apparent result. Everything smothered into the earth.

For a long time her mother stood at the open door, dumb, immovable, then went slowly outside again, almost without motion, and in a few minutes re-entered in the same muffled way.

At last she spoke; on a sudden burst of laughter from the three boys in their chamber above.

'Stop that or I'll give you a mark you'll not be the better of soon,' she called up.

The noise above ceased.

Don slipped into the house, barefooted. All his rags flying, a blithe and nimble-footed scarecrow, he ran swiftly up the ladder to the make-shift second storey, the loose boards of which resounded to his movements, and in a second he was shouting to his bed-fellow, Tim, 'Move over there, you—I'll shoot you dead—quick.'

Margaret gave a sigh of relief. Don's heavy endearments, his nonchalance (he had not see Harry at all) eased the strain.

Matters were perhaps not so bad after all, but poor

Harry—he must have frightened her mother. Poor Harry did come painfully to one's notice at times, and to-night it was so unexpected. They thought he had long since gone home. And he was so gnomish, so strange-looking. One had become accustomed to him, one thought, but now again to-night his ugliness had startled her, Margaret, for a moment. And her mother must have been much more startled.

Poor Harry. He bore some resemblance to his mother, Bella, a Sioux, who lived in a hut some distance up the river, who was not beautiful—yet he had none of her fierceness, none of the fierceness of those wild, battling people from whom he sprang. One heard of them across the border, their special hunting-ground. Harry, indeed, who had a white or half-breed father, one understood, in that conforming to type, was most docile. It was impossible to anger him and he never resented any treatment, no matter how violent.

Poor Harry, gnomish, pock-marked, of no age. Poor Harry whom one forgot in the main but who came painfully to one's notice at times. His liking for dog meat was his unforgivable sin. Last year he had cut up old Blackhead, boiled him down and eaten him. On that occasion her mother had shown the strongest animosity towards him, her words falling pell-mell on him, like hail, so that he had absented himself three days. The fourth day he had come slinking back 'like a whipped cur' Donovan said (further remarking, how could he help it, being so full of dog) and had settled down to grub out weeds with his hands.

Her mother had not sent him away again as she had

said she would, should he ever show his face around again. The weeds had grown enormously in his absence.

Since then he had worked slavishly for his meals, weeding, digging, ploughing. He could plough a furrow even straighter than Don. And when papa was home, he waited on *him,* hand and foot.

On the whole there was little to vex one about Harry now. He had shown every sign of contrition for eating Blackhead, and Don, of course, was taking every precaution with regard to Luke, shutting him up in the stable at night 'lest he, too,' as the rector so oddly said, 'became an integral part of Harry.'

There was nothing unusual about his returning after they had thought he had left for the night—His yellow ochre canoe upstream? She had not guessed? A last streak of rosy light had given it that deeper colour. Why had she not thought of that?—and, had she not—had not the odour of him reached her—from inside the house? —no, no, he had never come into the house, unbidden, before. Never, never. She had not thought of that.

These two reflections were disturbing, more than anything else about him.

If they could do without him, perhaps, it would be wisest? Mamma truly would like to do without him, if it were at all possible.

But how could Don do without him?

It was not possible. It could not be considered.

Yet she did wish—perhaps—there might be someone else? But they had tried—there was no one—no one could bear with——

They might try again, there was a possibility——?

Then, these rapid oscillations between two opinions, which might have continued much longer, were suddenly cut short by her observation of her mother in the other room. *She was bolting the door!* How singular! Few in the settlement used locks or bolts of any sort at any time.

She was lighting a large candle! And another? She set them both on the table.

She was going to the old sea chest beside the fireplace. She was rummaging there. In a moment she called, 'Margaret come here.'

Margaret hurried out of her little room, off the big common room. Her mother was holding in her hands the parts of an old black silk mantle of her own which she had undertaken to fashion into a jacket to suit her daughter.

'Keep to the ruching,' she said cryptically, putting long folds previously prepared into the hands of Margaret, who, quivering, dropped to a stool and, equipped with thread, needle and thimble, began to gather the folds expertly.

Her mother walked about the room, went to the door again, unbolted it, looked out, went out, was out a long time it seemed to Margaret, apprehensive, came in again, bolted the door and returned the gun (which Margaret had not either seen her take nor return) to its place above the door, below the motto 'We hanged our harp on a willow'. At last she sat down on the opposite side of the table and began to sew on the main part of the garment, swiftly, her stitches stinging in and out of the material,

as if she found satisfaction in the needle's penetrating sharply and in the resulting sharp, twinging sounds.

Into Margaret sewing on, not yet looking up, oblivious as so often to the obvious, these sounds coming threadwise, needlewise from her mother sent a new excitement, a new wonder, finally sympathy. All her own mood, her bewilderment, her questioning, her uneasiness and a slight undercurrent of resentment that her mother should have spoken to them so loudly and so unreasonably (a resentment however, which no dutiful daughter would show a sign of, which was wrong, quite wrong) were changed to active sympathy by the currents coming threadwise, needlewise from her mother.

Mamma was feeling acutely about something. Margaret dared to look up at her kindly. But her mother's head was bent and no glances were exchanged. Puzzled then, Margaret absently gazed at the insects about the candles.

Against the close netting on one front window, the only window open, a host of winged midgets pressed. Bred by darkness—they were not visible in day-time—hungry for what they lacked in their origin they sought the light, beating against the barrier. Some managed to worm through the mesh and spreading minute pinions reach the table and circle dizzily around the candle flame.

'Ssh.' Looking up, her mother swept them away, then noticed her daughter. 'Keep to your work—and hold yourself straight,' she admonished briefly.

Margaret came swiftly upright. For one moment she had fallen from the prescribed perpendicular. Hurriedly her butterfly hands fluttered over the silk, then finding

their place at the last stitch sewed on industriously. At the same time she heaved another sigh, bigger and deeper than the previous sigh, expressive of much greater relief, which the every day, every hour call to arms 'sit up straight' afforded her.

Her mother could not now be feeling so acutely. Indeed at the moment she was not sewing so strenuously. The tension of her thread was easier, much easier.

So great was Margaret's relief that at the very top of it—marvel of marvels—while steadily gazing at her work, she made a startling and quite irrelevant suggestion.

'Would it be at all possible for me, mamma—to attain to a sufficient degree of proficiency in the making of wax flowers—do you think——?' her voice failed her momentarily, then marched on, thin and high, 'to take a post as preceptress in that branch in Mrs. Toll's Academy?'

'A fine notion that! A fine notion that.'

Her mother was shocked, inexpressibly shocked, Margaret saw immediately.

'No daughter of mine,' she next declared, and Margaret was not in any way surprised, 'had I a hundred, should ever demean herself by the receipt of wages.'

Margaret bent her head lower and still lower, while holding her spine in that straight line of duty (and of beauty?) and sewed on wildly. Scarlet petals now, the rector, horticulturally inclined, might have noticed, overlay her cheeks, might have noticed too the shy, quivering curve of her white, white throat, the delicate precision of her features now appearing so clear-cut,

more crystal-like, all the perfection yet timidity at least of a wild flower.

How had it happened that she had voiced this idea? At so inauspicious a moment too? As soon as she had voiced it, its fine phrasing fell away, and naked, she saw it herself as it had appeared to her mother, a brazen idea.

All she could do was to sew on more diligently, if possible, to cover in that way her hasty speech; and there was something she could do well, beyond criticism. She could sew with neatness, with microscopic stitches and with great rapidity. And finally indeed by dint of a series of swift 'runs' her needle not leaving the material for a foot or more at a time, she had gathered all the folds as they should be and the ruching was completed, her part of the work.

Then she had nothing to do but watch the insects around the candles, the most daring soonest burnt to death; with an expression of repressed vivacity and mortification.

She had not expected to speak of this idea for swelling the family purse so soon. In all cases *il faut tâter le terrain*. But it had slipped out. Moreover she knew nothing of making wax flowers nor how she could learn. But the fancy had appealed to her. Wax flowers might constitute the least objectionable means of acquiring wealth, might not, because of their delicacy and prettiness, be objectionable at all.

Now it seemed there was nothing. It was not the rudeness of one's occupation that mattered as much as the fact of receiving wages.

Her confused and smitten glance leaving at last the

poor singeing moths, sank into an unlighted corner of the room and remained there long enough to bury some of the hurt of her mistake, and coming back somewhat eased looked again at her mother, and, her head being bent over still, began to consider her hair. It was so dark, so glossy. And it was so long. It fell to her knees and around her like a shawl when released at night to be braided into two long ropes. In day time it was always as now, in undulating bandeaux, curving from a perfect centre parting low over her ears to the massive coils at the back. A solid, sculptured coiffure it was, never losing its polished serenity no matter what stress, what weather. Beautiful at any time, now with the candle light brushing it, softening it, giving it subtle shadows, it seemed to remove its owner far off, somewhere?

Movements began in Margaret's brain seeking a concept of her mother other than the settled, usual one, of a woman with a body like iron, preferring work in the open to work in the house, up by sunrising, building fires in the great clay oven outside, milking, planting, weeding; roughening, deforming her hands, chafing her skin, torturing her clothes. Her hair alone, her beautiful hair quarrelled with this coarseness. And, the fact, Margaret had almost forgotten, that she had on a few rare occasions, when it was suitable, assumed a cultivated manner.

On a few rare occasions, that was all. Why did she not always? Margaret's eyes, dark, lobelia blue, now wandered about the room, sitting-room, dining-room and kitchen in one, eyes ready for once for some chance illumination on an unusual inquisitive impulsion.

A week ago her mother had whitewashed anew the walls and the clay fireplace. Their whiteness contrasted harshly with the dark oak doors, window frames and deep sills. The floors, at this time of the year bare of skins, were scoured clean. A few stools, a couple of benches, one chair with seat and back of shaganappi, the long barracks-like table at which mother and daughter sat, all came under Margaret's scrutiny in a different way from ever before.

Without result.

The Carron stove acquired last winter from Angus Currie and unpaid for, was noticeable, so new, so shining, so black. All the cold months it had been the object of great veneration, giving forth heat and agreeable noises. Humming, intoning, sometimes thumping out a throttled bass, as a musical instrument affording an effective background to the open grate with its crackling melodies, free and unrestrained. And as a dispenser of warmth it surpassed the fireplace. In the beginning they one and all had regarded the big, black stove with fear, but when winter came and it proved itself the force of greatest good, fear diminished and appreciation grew, appreciation still tinged with awe. Even now, though so cold and dumb, so empty, it inspired respect.

But it did not help shape those hazy stirrings in the back of Margaret's head. It was too new perhaps.

The massive oak dresser from which articles of crockery gleamed, in full view against the rear wall, in its fine lines, its workmanship, its good wood, looked what it undoubtedly was, the best piece of furniture in the room, one might say the only piece of furniture in the room.

But it had been in the house before the Moores. It was too old perhaps. Certainly it had nothing to do with them, was if anything, an alien force in Margaret's present survey.

And cooking utensils, water-yokes, a hairy bag of pemmican in their allotted places; candle forms, piles of fur clippings, wings of wild geese on wide exposed cross beams along the walls suggested only the life they lived every day, nothing more. And the old gun above the front door, below the motto, embroidered by her mother, in green and brown wool, 'We hanged our harp on a willow'.

What did that mean? Margaret had never thought of it before. There might be something in this.

'Does "harp", mamma, in the motto refer to Ireland and "willow" to this country?'

In a venturing tone Margaret made this enquiry. The strange thing was that she should venture at all. And again, this night of all nights, stranger than even her sudden interpretation of her Bible's words.

Her mother looked up, startled, at the motto, then down again.

'Whatever it says.'

On the mantel was the clock which had stopped at ten o'clock more than a year ago, when her father had last tinkered with it, and which had not advanced since. The case was of yellow wood. A blue, green, purple and red design decorated the lower part of the door. Her father had brought the clock all the way from Detroit. While it had ticked and while its hands had moved it had cheered them all, but it revealed itself now only as

it had revealed itself for months, as a tawdry, ornate shell. So strong was that suggestion that Margaret gathered no other, if there were others to gather.

At one side of the dead time-piece was the daguerreotype (before she saw the daguerreotype, Margaret had thought the word referred to a small snail-like dog, with long ears, that type of dog) of her father in his uniform and wearing his medal. For papa had been a soldier of merit in India, had been wounded and was in receipt of a pension. It was an excellent likeness, to obtain which he had stood before a machine of occult workings.

But neither did the daguerreotype throw any light on anything.

The old sea chest which her mother always kept locked, which contained her beautiful shawl and the presents brought her by papa at different times, a pair of beaded cuffs, a scented grass necklace, an ivory box skilfully carved, many trinkets, from which she had taken the parts of the old mantle to-night, had its mate in many homes on the rivers.

There was little in the house different from the many similar whitewashed log houses in the settlement, (to that extent at least the Moores were a typical family), and in the end Margaret felt she had struggled to wrest something from space itself, some condition in her parents' past which had never existed. From nothing one could obtain nothing.

She would have liked to think that at some time in the past her parents had seen better days, had been less impoverished than until recently, but nothing pointed to that.

C'est tout autre chose.

There was that short time, truly, when, mamma having come as a bride from Ireland with papa, had dwelt at the Fort. A short time when mamma had had wealthier friends—but even during that time all had not been satisfactory, financially. Far from it.

The jacket was nearing completion. Her mother was applying the ruching. After a time she came to the ultimate stitch, fastened the thread strongly and snapped it clean.

'You may go to bed soon.' She looked up. Her eyes were calmer than they had been. 'Your father will be coming home shortly.'

'Oh!' The abruptness of the revelation left Margaret breathless.

'Stand up.'

Margaret stood up, to try on the garment.

It was satisfactory. She took it off.

'It is quite handsome.'

Her mother sat down again to extract bastings.

'You and Don must go to the Fort—soon—to the store.'

'But why—why, mamma, does papa go away so much?' Margaret stammered, and gasped, immediately astonished at her own question, the most extraordinary question of this extraordinary evening. The words, it seemed, had been driven into her with the force to express them, by some outside agency, not of her own will or thought. That her father might have a particular reason for going away had never occurred to her.

'It is his brother that he seeks,' her mother dropped

this information, so astounding to Margaret, in a casual murmur, adding briskly, 'Now push over the scissors.'

Margaret pushed over the scissors, awed, and after a full minute had elapsed said in a faint, weak voice, 'I did not know, mamma, that papa had a brother.'

'He has that—I am free to say—if he is alive?' clipping at odd ends busily—while Margaret, recovering from mere astonishment itself, clasped and unclasped her small hands in rapture. Papa coming home soon! And an uncle! To have an uncle. They had been singularly lacking in an uncle, in relatives of any sort, whereas the Curries and all their neighbours had a great many relatives.

'Your father has had little hearth comfort,' her mother said with a sigh.

Rarely, rarely did mamma sigh that way. Margaret gazed at her in still greater happiness and drew at the same time from those innocent words the foundation for her soul's first great awakening.

'But it is given him by nature to be strong.'

'Yes, mamma—and—may—our uncle return—with papa?'

'I hope so—and whilst I have told you this, it is best not to speak of it to anyone.'

'No, mamma,' drawing a deep, ecstatic breath.

'To no one, you understand.—If the game is worth the candle?' Smoothing and patting the corners of the jacket. 'Now go get your sleep.'

With a last beaming glance of vast understanding at her mother, Margaret rose and went to her room.

So this was 'he' of whom her parents had spoken so often! 'He' was their uncle, for whom papa had been searching many years.

For whom papa had been searching many years.

Chapter IV

In high spirits, several mornings later, Margaret and Donovan started out for the Fort along the cart track, two black ruts in the grass sparkling with remnants of a light frost. Donovan was in a fine mood on his own account. During the night or early morning, June had taken another of those drops in which it had been indulging too frequently for his peace of mind. At breakfast, very early, he had announced that he was afraid that his new wheat had been nipped. Later he said that this was not so, that not a blade in the whole plot had been seriously injured.

They were hardly on their way, whipped to vigour too, by long waves of cool air washing in from the vast sea of green without, when Don, man and boy, began to run.

Margaret remembered in time that it was not permissible for her to run, but walking after her brother at a pace almost as heating, arrived very soon, with a deep colour in her cheeks, at the grove of trees, where seated on a fallen bole he awaited her, his tall, glossy hat resting on its crown on the ground. A tall, glossy hat, no less—and more! The contrast between his previous appearance and his present was excessive. There is quite a possibility that he might have been taken for a young gentleman of the first society of the settlement, if it had not been—But in the meantime Margaret having reached him, sat down beside him, composed

herself, settled her green bonnet, which had been lately renovated, smoothed out the green gown sprigged with pink flowers, patted the little black silk coat, reaching just below her waist. 'My *petit pardessus*' she was calling it, endeared to her especially now by the fact that it had been completed just as she had heard the good news. The news and it had been put into circulation, one might consider, at the same moment. So she patted the little overcoat and caressed it, almost as if it were a person, or a kitten, or a baby brother, until at last satisfied, she sat very still and stiff, very proper, her eyes glued to the curled frond of a fern, as if expecting it to unfurl in sight; in reality not seeing it at all, nor the leaves at which she turned her correct little gaze, nor the patches of new moss on the ground, nothing, until her foot, inadvertently moving aside a gathering of mouldy leaves, exposed a purple violet. She saw that.

'Oh—oh—look! Look Don—a violet!' she exclaimed in joy, as if discovering a new world.

And it was a new world—and in Margaret's heart was a song, an entirely new song, sufficient at moments to lift her above matters of deportment, above costumes, above flora and fauna, above all terrene things; much above the uneasiness of a recent night, its half fears and its gloom.

And had not Harry for that matter, a small matter, been coming every morning as usual (dodging, greasy as usual), had he not been getting his breakfast every morning as usual, all his meals, outside, his orders from Don which he had executed better than usual, and had he not left every evening early and remained away until

the next morning? And every morning Patrick and Robert had gone to school and every morning mamma was actively about,—and no longer was there that strange expression on her face—Timothy at her heels. All oppression of the family spirit had vanished and in its stead, reigned the great anticipation. The husband and father was coming home. That anticipation reigned in all, and in Margaret an alluring vision as well.

A most welcome vision.

Neat, unruffled, cool, she issued finally from the fairy wood with Donovan, whose hat she noticed had gathered some fluff. Removing the tall, stately article of headgear from his thick thatch, still tangled and burred, she brushed it lightly with her hand and blew on it until its satiny surface was once more undimmed, then replaced it with care.

She was proud of Donovan. She appreciated his sterling qualities, more than she sensed his rapid awkward growth. Big loosely-knit body, lips, too, somewhat loosely-knit, large inelegant feet, and hands covered with a whitish down matching the same growth on his upper lip; large ears folded nearly double, having been so adjusted to suit the circumference of his father's hat, which lacking such platforms would have fallen much lower on Donovan's neck. What Margaret knew of Donovan living with him day by day was that he had sterling qualities. And as she saw him now garbed in his father's cinnamon coloured suit and tall beaver hat, cinnamon coloured too, a trifle faded, she considered him complete in every detail.

No, not quite in every detail. Clothes were very

important. Very important. But people's spirits were very important too. There were perhaps just the two branches to people—and a third, their faces. Human beings were bodiless, were clothes topped off by faces, the whole animated by spirit. Clothes, faces, spirit, each quite complicated and having many ramifications and many subdivisions, doubtless. But these were her headings for people. She had liked making headings at school and had excelled in classification, in making topics in history, in geography; and in a notebook she possessed she had everything there was to know on such subjects indicated under certain headings. She might not know at all, all there was to know on these subjects, but someone knew it all or it was in books, and certainly she never doubted that the headings were sufficient in all cases. So unconsciously she *felt* in people three branches chiefly, clothes, faces and spirit, and judged them accordingly. There was nothing lacking in Donovan's clothes, fortunately for once. Nor was there anything lacking in his face. But there was something, unfortunately, in spite of his sterling qualities, lacking in his spirit. A much to be regretted lack, arising from the fact that he did not know everything concerning their father, having been informed merely that papa was expected home in the course of a fortnight and that they must go to the Fort to make purchases in view of that event. Don had not been surprised at all. He was rarely surprised. But he could not have helped being astonished had he been made aware of the most admirable fact of all in this connection, that for many, many weary years papa had

been scouring the big world over for his long lost brother for whom he was willing to die.

For whom he was willing to die.

Donovan could not have helped being astonished had he known that—and a little air of astonishment added to a pleasing countenance, a cinnamon coloured suit and a tall beaver would not have been out of the way at all. But he could not have even that because of his far greater lack.

He had not been thinking that their father had any reason for going hither and thither—fathers went about, particularly their father—any more than she had been thinking, until a few days ago. And now it was impossible for her to re-produce the dullness which she had felt all those years while labouring under that ignorance. All her previous life it seemed she had endured a certain weariness and now that it no longer existed it was difficult to imagine that it had been. Who her uncle was in particular, what he looked like, how he came to be lost, what his circumstances were, were points concerning which she was incurious (and that was rather a good thing for she never, it might just as well be told here, saw him and in the end knew hardly more of him than when she first heard of him). All that concerned her *now* was that he existed, was lost and her father had been seeking him, as a brother should, many weary years. That was enough and more than enough. In fact in the first flush of what knowledge she had, she felt that she knew everything in the matter, that all her previous life had been in course of transit to this information, that now she had arrived at last.

And that seemed to her fated. She had been impelled by the destiny over-ruling all to ask a question. She had been in the hands of a higher power, bringing her along a tiresome course to that question, which, when put, had had so astonishing, so real a result; proof again of divine intervention. She had been kept along a path leading to a strange door, at which, staring her in the face, she had knocked. And presto it had been opened by an extraordinary freedom of speech on the part of her mother; whose habitual silence concerning her father, Margaret might be permitted to notice now that it had been to such an extent remedied, had in itself constituted a family blight.

But how deftly now her mother had eased that old puzzling blight, with a few words, a very few words but sufficient. Her father had had so little hearth comfort, yet it was given him by nature to be strong. Already she had fondled those words many times while fondling her *petit pardessus*. So subtle an appraising of his great mission. It was given him by nature to be strong—for his great purpose. His love for his brother! Her dear father with whom she had been only superficially acquainted was so much nobler even than she had been thinking, so much nobler.

If Donovan had this added to his spirit, this vision of their father, how uplifted he would feel—not that he appeared particularly downcast, but he could not feel as she, not knowing that for many weary years papa had been searching for his long lost brother for whom he was willing to die.

She would have liked to tell him, but for reasons in-

scrutable she must not. It was a secret and must remain a secret. So with her lips held very tightly together at the moment of this recollection, as if padlocked, she walked along beside her brother, now and again looking up at him with a tinge of regret for what his spirit lacked, which would induce in his face that look of astonishment and possibly a slight approach to loftiness which would be so becoming. Walking along beside him, with padlocked lips, with a tinge of regret in her glances up to him, yet with a glorious and unaffected content in her own face, and an unusual definiteness. Seeing at last the glint of a pattern in their life, effacing all unpleasant considerations (such as Colin Currie, such as Harry if he were a consideration at all, effacing all that and more) making her very, very young again, and stirred only by such things as are revealed to the 'Nurslings of immortality'.

'My eye, Maggie!' Don exclaimed at one stage of their journey. 'We are twenty years behindhand.'

'But Don,' tears in her voice almost that he should offer any criticism of their native surroundings, 'we have churches and schools—Mr. Currie's fine dwelling—and store—and others—his glass house—and the new Bishop's Court which we hear is so large and imposing—and—and'—her climax was inspired by one in sight 'a great many windmills.'

'Windmills,' Donovan scoffed.

'Oh, Donovan, if a boat should appear on the river pushed by steam, as you think, would you be afraid?'

'Afraid?'

'Of course it cannot be?'

'You may have a surprise.'

'But we are very well as we are.'

'We are behindhand. I know from what I hear.'

'But you would not allow that to trouble you nor anything else if you knew what I know.' After all if she could win a surprised expression in Don's face without telling, if she could win that much, what harm done?

'Why, what can that be?' Don was surprised, alarmingly so.

'Oh—I can't tell.'

'What do you mean?' he demanded. If Margaret had no flair for news he had. Ordinary, everyday news he scented a league away.

'Oh, nothing, nothing whatever.' Margaret pursed her lips and went on firmly.

'What is it?'

'Nothing. Nothing whatever.'

'You are obliged to tell me,' Don dictated.

'There is nothing to tell.'

'You are obliged to tell me,' he repeated threateningly.

'There is nothing to tell.'

Finally Don desisted, though still staring with distressing suspicion at her. Many people were talking of the possibility of a steamboat coming down the Red River from 'the States'. Could it be that Margaret, a girl not allowed to run, knew anything about it? She rarely knew anything about anything. Yet there was something different about her. She was good-looking, now that he looked at her, almost as good-looking as people said. But if she had any such news, obtained in some queer way, he would extort it from her some time,

later, or surprise it out of her. In the meantime he satisfied himself with thinking of the picture she had inspired, of a steamboat, one of those wonders of far-off fabled civilization, penetrating the Colony, a picture which pleased him as much as Margaret's secret pleased her, to which she returned, relieved that it was still intact after the danger to which she had exposed it. Tempted to draw one and only one delicious gasp of surprise from Donovan, she had dangled the secret right before his eyes. Now she realized how great had been the risk. He had almost taken it away from her by main force, almost destroyed it. His surprise, his interest, much greater than she had bargained for, were not exactly delicious.

Resolved never again to be so rash, she walked along beside him, lips tightly padlocked again, looking about her, relieved, and allowing the prairie alone for the time being to share the secret with her. The plains this morning were well adapted to her need, had all the brightness and many of the parts of a close friend. They had now none of the concealments of dark nights, but were full of light, and fluent in their own language, which Margaret understood. No longer oppressed by great heat, the long billowy fields had resumed that profound murmur, their most constant quality, to Margaret now a tone of assurance, declaring as clearly as any human voice the glory of brotherly love, sacrifice and long purpose.

Nothing interrupted this converse for some time, and the prairie was still visible and audible, whether the road wound between enclosed fields of black ribbed earth,

newly ploughed and glistening, or close to the rear of dwellings, to wood stacks or piles of poplar poles beside clay ovens, or struck out again in the open. There was much uncultivated land, where strawberries bloomed in foaming white patches, and once Margaret stooped from that wonderful converse to pick a white blossom, which in lieu of the secret she attached to the cinnamon coloured coat lapel of Donovan, who cast it off and thrust its donor aside into a thicket of wild roses. There she stood with her back turned to him, long enough to touch tight little buds with her finger tips and to purr over them, taking advantage of her enforced position, then returning to the cart track, to her converse with the plains, unimpaired by brotherly rudeness.

Birds in bushes, too, carolled of the same thing. A prairie chicken walked out from a clump of willows merely to goggle at the possessor of a great secret, but withdrew in haste yet with dignity when Don flourished a switch which he was carrying for flourishing purposes.

Only once again, when they met a couple of squaws bearing on their backs bundles of moss, Margaret's thoughts gently detoured. Cleansed and refined, the sweet moss lined the bags in which all dark, olive babies were encased. Handsome bags on which Indian and half-breed mothers lavished much fine embroidery, figurines of animals, of flowers, wrought in beads, in silk, often in their own hair. White mothers, too, sometimes adopted the convenient moss bag and cradle. Margaret herself had sometimes carried Tim, as an infant, so equipped, not on her back, but from spot to spot by his handle.

Near its end the road ran beside a scattering of tepees deserted except for very old squaws, dusky children playing almost naked and papooses propped against tent poles, cart wheels or bundles. The absentees, Don at once realized, were already at the Fort delivering their furs; and as he and his sister progressed he saw more and more people ahead of them, on foot, on horses, or on ox-carts, all going in the same direction.

Farther on again he glimpsed, stretching out into the prairie, a great platoon of tents, filling him with wonder.

'My eye! New Indians. They came early this morning, I wager. My eye how grand!'

Their tepees were smarter, more embellished with drawings and paintings—Donovan's eagle eye perceived, than the tepees, brave as they were, just passed, belonging to regular customers of the Company. One of the many bands who would pour in during the summer.

Excitedly Donovan increased his speed, urging Margaret along. The heat of the sun was growing. Donovan removed his hat and set it on his head at an airier, cooler angle. Margaret opened the fastening of her *petit pardessus* and exposed a throat white as milk.

Soon they entered a zone where the heat and moisture were like those of a huge glass-house. Dew and frost melting on the ground, distillations from all the lush growth of the prairie filled the air with a warm, sweet-scented lymph. In this area of artificial heat, as it seemed, an equestrian party in noble riding gear appeared. Confronting Margaret and Donovan almost, all turned suddenly aside and cantered off at right angles;

except one man whose swiftly checked steed champed right before the brother and sister.

'What is your name, my pretty maid?' the splendidly accoutred horseman enquired.

Startled, Margaret gasped and, curtseying ever so slightly, murmured, 'Margaret Moore, sir.'

'And who may be your clodhopper friend?'

For answer Margaret took the clodhopper's arm and began to walk off, both hurt and haughty. But Donovan pulled from her and plunged after the departing gallant, shouting at him, waving at him the large stone jug he was carrying, throwing chunks of earth in his direction; but all impotently. The man was soon out of reach and much dishevelled, threatening all things, Donovan returned to his wounded and bewildered sister.

She knew (Don too) several of the party, now out on the plains singing, 'Dear, dear, what can the matter be——?' Words floating back and much laughter. Plump Fanny Currie (daughter of Angus) in a bright purple habit; Simone Laflamme, her half-sister, a sleek seal in brown with velvety brown eyes. Simone, lovely Simone, would never have so addressed them.

Were not these and others their friends, and did not Don appear most admirable? And one would not connect such a speech with the most important person of all the group—if Margaret had not been on the instant so stabbed to the quick she would have paid more attention to him—Sir James Cameron, himself, no less, in gorgeous equestrian raiment. On his annual tour of inspection Sir James had arrived a few days since at the Lower Fort, twenty miles below the Upper Fort on the

Red River. His brightly painted canoe leading, he had dashed up the river to the music of bagpipes, landing with much pomp and circumstance, in full view of the great crowd gathered at the Lower Fort to accord him, the Governor of the Hudson Bay in North America, a royal welcome.

Others, too, among the riders were known to the brother and sister, but the man with the gilded manner, the black beard and the white face who had so obtruded himself, they had never seen before and never wished to see again; Don at least expressing himself to that effect, most emphatically.

Chapter V

But both Margaret and Donovan were young and buoyant, and another leaven, all this time working through them, soon began to develop almost normally. Visiting the Fort was an event the importance of which could not altogether be neutralized by events *en passant,* no matter how surprising or unpleasant. All along the way the thought of what the visit might have in store for them had been stimulating, as well as other thoughts. And when at last they arrived before the high walls, in spite of the recent encounter, they viewed with awe only a trifle less than usual the stately corner towers with their projecting cannon, from which on the arrival of Governor Cameron a salute had been fired. Never in their memories had the black guns boomed for other than ceremonial purposes, yet they always inspired reverence.

Then inside the River Gate, facing the Assiniboine they found themselves immediately among quite a throng of people, (with so many absent from the settlement) more than they had expected, white men (the least number) and half-breeds, as well as red men. It was evident that the latest arrivals would not be able to make their purchases soon, for numbers before them had not yet been admitted into the store, the most important emporium in the wilderness, but not large. Scarcely twenty shoppers could be accommodated at a time in this limited holy of commercial holies, and the custom

was when that number or less had entered, to bolt the door until they were supplied.

But it was exciting enough without. The people and the general holiday air served very well in the meantime to entertain Donovan; a holiday air streaked too with an air of urgent business, which he soon became involved in observing minutely.

A man with a pail and a brush, he saw, was painting the door of the officers' quarters. Servants of the Company went in and came out of the long, white warehouses along the western walls, where were stored goods in large quantities, house furnishings, tools, building materials, pemmican and dried buffalo meat, the human fodder of the West, at times stacked up to the ceilings like bales of hay.

A man hurried from a building carrying half-a-dozen chairs, bristling with chair legs. Two others hastened from the direction of the liquor warehouse behind the store, bearing a large hamper.

'It's shrub,' whispered Donovan, mysteriously inspired.

They wandered past the flagstaff and belfry to the rear of the Colony Governor's residence, a square stone mansion facing the North Gate, framed by an elaborate, stone archway.

A maid appeared at a door, revolved and disappeared. Another or the same capped maid appeared, revolved and disappeared. A woman in a huge crinoline bounced out of the same door, screamed at a man working in the garden, who immediately dropped his spade and leapt the steps into the house.

'The currant bushes are in blossom,' Don commented.

A man with a huge bouquet of recently slaughtered chickens athwart one arm, blood dripping from their necks, came into sight. Old Jacques, their neighbour, appeared with a basket of mushrooms. Other vendors, more servants, bearing water, two buckets from each yoke, converged towards the gubernatorial kitchen.

All this, and much more, clarified, would result in a grand repast in honour of Sir James, the great fur Company's distinguished head on this side of the Atlantic.

'Governor Patterson will be giving the big Governor a tolerable meal I'm thinkin',' Don commented, on a boyish note of rare sadness.

But there were compensations. Among the crowd brought out by the fine morning, by curiosity and the hope of seeing the great man, as well as the constant need for tobacco and rum, Donovan saw many friends (some enduring the same pangs as himself, even perhaps, companions in misery), women and girls wearing head shawls, and short skirts, some of skin; some with smocks and leggings too of skin, fringed and embroidered, others, a much smaller number, wearing crinolines and bonnets; men and boys in the usual capotes and coarse caps of the country or capless; others distinguished by the tight-waisted, full-skirted coats and tall hats of civilization—as Don, himself.

Among a bevy of French half-breeds padding in, moccasin shod, as almost everyone else, were the two Desjardins boys, mild mannered, with dark wondering eyes, who came up to Margaret and Donovan and addressing them, remained beside them.

'Damn fine day, I tink me,' Prosper said, in brisk English.

'Damn fine day, I tink me,' Henri echoed.

Both Prosper and Henri were well favoured. Both had had two years' schooling. More than Don. Moreover the Desjardins were quite wealthy plainhunters, who, last winter when their little sister had died while in St. Paul visiting friends with her mother, had brought home the body over the snow in a snow-white coffin, marvellously carved. The Moores had never seen a coffin like it. When their two little sisters had died (a long time ago) they had been buried together in a rough box, not covered with cotton even.

The Desjardins were undoubtedly an interesting family. Don kept them beside him, laughing and talking to them.

Mrs. Denny, distinguished latterly by her possession of a bird that could talk, acquired, Donovan had heard, from Bella, Harry's mother—curious, too—approached.

' 'As papa return?' she enquired.

'Not yet Mistress Denny, but we expect him in a fortnight or less,' Margaret glowed.

'A sight for sore heyes, I'll sy, the Major.'

'Does your bird talk yet?' Donovan asked, sliding his tall hat farther back on his head.

'Indeed and it do. That's what a parrot do.'

Old Joe Hillam who was always looking up at the sky, calculating by the sun the time of *his* next meal went by. Stalwart Francoix Lacroix who carried the mail between the Fort and the United States border arrived, covered with mud, and bringing a tale of Sioux atrocities

across the line—a whole settlement of whites wiped out.

Margaret would not listen, although Antoine was so excited. He waved his arms and talked very fast. A trifle frightening, but why, in a peaceful colony, think of such far-off calamities? With so much else of so different a nature to think about?

A number of Scots invaded the walled city from 'down the Red', descendants of the original settlers brought out by Lord Selkirk, their farms the best in the Colony. Among these was Angus Currie, friend of the Moores, father of the bonny Fanny now dashing over the prairie with her fashionable companions, and of fourteen other children, not counting Simone, his step-daughter.

Angus Currie was an important personage. Besides being a skilful farmer he was a merchant and a 'free-trader'. That is, he dealt with the Indians on his own account and himself operated a line of boats to York Factory, connecting with the ships overseas. He was on both sides of Scottish parentage but he had a wife 'of the country'. 'Wild Rose' as Mrs. Currie was still called, in all fondness, now almost helplessly fat, was reputed to have been in girlhood, one of the most beautiful of Cree princesses.

'Pappy home soon?' the family benefactor queried.

'Yes, sir, in a fortnight or less.'

'I was thinking so.' Looking around, 'Quite—a to-do—quite a to-do—think they'll be havin' a peep at the Czar of all the Roosias, maybe?'

'Is there any likelihood, sir, of a steamboat coming this summer?'

The oracle, who wore a tam o' shanter and heavy beef boots, slowly stroked his long, brown beard, over which drooped a full, red lower lip. 'If you live long eno' my lad, you'll hear the whustle blowin'—nae doot of that,' he said, his sea blue eyes looking into the future as into the sea. 'It's no all puff—it's no all puff.'

Radiating joy Don spoke up again. 'We could make another payment, sir, on the plough.'

'Now don't trouble yourself,' laying a hand on Don's shoulder. 'I'll hae a word with your pappy about that. And remember what I'm tellin' ye lad, it's a treasure house you have on that land, a treasure house. Remember that. Stick to that,' repeating in parting, 'stick to that. And don't give up the coo, either. Stick to that. Stick to the coo, lad, stick to the coo,' he called back firmly, and went off.

The pride of Margaret and Donovan was being reinstated, Mr. Currie's praise and counsel alone were an almost complete antidote to the recent attack on it.

None of their friends here, none of their friends of the riding party, Margaret reflected, would ever have addressed any of the family as had that stranger. Not Angus Currie, not Sir James, not Fanny Currie, not Simone.

Truly not Simone.

A delightful conversation held with Simone while at school, for the twentieth time unrolled in Margaret's warm, fluttering bosom, where she cherished it.

'I think it is so suitable, Margaret, that your father should bear the title of Major. I did not know until today, is it not curious, that it was a courtesy title con-

ferred on him by his many friends. How suitable! He has quite the Major manner.' Here Simone had strode across the room in her best military 'Major manner', tugging at an elaborate, if invisible moustache.

Margaret had smiled. 'His friends honour him with the title. It has clung to him,' she had said.

'How well such titles are conferred! That you yourself should be known throughout the settlement and at distant posts as the "Lily of Fort Garry", seems to me most appropriate, when you are so fair, fairest of the fair, when you live so simply and when your parents are as your learned rector says "of pure transatlantic blood".'

Margaret had stammered, blushing, ' "Lily of Fort Garry"—"pure transatlantic blood"—I did not know of this before Simone, and I am indeed flattered.'

'I think "Lily of Fort Garry" most captivating—as its owner.'

Overcome Margaret had blushed; and recalling Simone's soft assertions blushed again.

Simone was kind and generous, lavish indeed in her extension of compliments. Simone was 'nicely educated' to quote the rector again. She had spent a year abroad. She spoke refined French, not as the Desjardins boys who in spite of their education *parlent comme les rustics* Simone herself said. She spoke correct English as well, and she could quote well the rector, remembering his longest words. Her half-sister, Fanny Currie, was different. She was lovable but thoughtless, sometimes boisterous. Several times at school she had been reproved for laughter.

How interested Simone would be, Margaret considered, to hear that they, the Moores, as everyone else in the Colony, had an uncle, a beneficent uncle (all uncles were beneficent). She might understand too, better than Don, who, Margaret sighed, might not after all understand; better than anyone else in the whole Colony, the noble part her father was playing in his search for that long lost uncle.

Had it not been Simone indeed who had said not so long ago—Margaret was not now certain of the context of this speech, nor how it began, the last sentence alone standing out:

'How long your father has been away. Night after night, I presume, but on the distant plains he establishes his lonely bivouac.'

'Night after night out on the distant plains he establishes his lonely bivouac.'

Simone would truly appreciate all that Margaret herself derived from the recent revelation. And had she not suggested too, this flashed on Margaret for the first time, an addition to her father's nobility? His 'lonely bivouac'. Papa who so loved people, who had so many friends in the settlement, had already spent many years of self-exile in the solitude of the wilds. ' "Night after night out on the distant plains he establishes his lonely bivouac." ' Margaret quoted to herself in sympathetic weariness.

Undoubtedly Simone would appreciate the revelation concerning papa. She had unconsciously climbed up several steps towards it. But, of course, Margaret could not share it with her. Not yet. It was part and parcel of

the secret. Later, when papa had returned, Margaret promised herself a heart to heart talk with Simone—but at present it was impossible.

And at present, as it happened, Simone was not in evidence.

And at present Margaret herself was obliged, for a moment at least, to forsake adoration of her vision. Don, nudging her so hard that she tottered slightly, whispered into her ear in a voice thick with glee, 'Look who is beside you.'

Steadying herself, Margaret looked, and saw the one who had elbowed the two Desjardins boys aside; Colin Currie, no less, eldest son and heir of Angus, a stout young man with string-coloured hair, hatless, coatless, his red-checked coat front the nutritive centre for many flies. Margaret looked and saw—and moved away from him, riveting her eyes exclusively on a point in space straight ahead of her for a long time; until Don had a new discovery for her. A group of Indians, much painted, ornaments in their hair, earrings, richly beaded and befringed leggings, costly blankets.

'They come from far—I hear them say—from the other side of the plains. They call themselves "The People".'

There were several other groups of Indians standing about, all passively. With the passivity of the past in them, of people whose part in the story of mankind was nearing its close. Once on this land they had been sole owners and lords. Here and out on the plains they now moved in obedience to the commands of the great Company. Once they had been in the foreground of the pic-

ture, but now silent, sometimes sullen, always passive, they occupied the background.

But 'The People' were different; statuesque they were perhaps, but with the expressions of visiting lords, impressive and commanding. Far away where they roamed, they were not in the background, but still the reigning force one felt. Certainly there was an importance about them, not shared by other groups of Indians; and Margaret caught some of her brother's awe.

'They say they come a thousand miles or more. I wonder why?'

Don's young inquisitiveness brooded silently awhile over the tableau of the resplendent, self-possessed natives—then over the whole gathering of which he and his sister were an unconscious part—but did not brood long, merely until he spied an old man, having on his head a sun bonnet draped with netting, a preparation for the mosquitoes of the future, possibly the very near future, and on his body a faded, light blue satin doublet and small clothes, silk hose and moccasins. A singular combination, even to Donovan, Henri and Prosper. It was to laugh, Prosper said and all three laughed right royally—and Colin Currie after a while, seeing the man and seeing the joke.

Chapter VI

MARGARET was not laughing, she was not noticing the old gentleman with the curious costume—ordinarily she noticed much less than her brother. Yet as she stood that day, with people all around her soaking in the sun —rendering all unawares so marvellous a phase of the prenatal existence of the West—tremors of understanding of the scene before her, the life of the community and of the plains, as centred in the Fort that day, were coming to her more strongly than ever before. Something from the chatter about her, the jesting, the laughter, the odd word with a friend, something from the salt and pith of simple lives, all moved through her more happily, even if unconsciously, than ever before; because of the happy core of her own private thoughts. For the greater part of the time while she looked on, listened in a measure and talked in a measure, while Donovan pointed out this and that and tried to poke this and that of his observation into her, her mind was bent on that one core and revolving actively about it, her father's great quest—through knowledge of which so much was being set at rest, one perplexity after another being explained.

It was like a gold thread. She liked that comparison, best of all. Or at least it was the one which occurred to her and which she adopted permanently. Thread of any sort except sinews of buffalo was rare enough in the

settlement and a gold thread would be priceless. She had never seen a gold thread in actuality nor ever expected to see one, but she could imagine one. The revelation of her father's search (soon the search itself) was like a gold thread, a magnetized gold thread, drawing one puzzle after another into a growing design; so that at last, perhaps, that which she had always longed for, the whole family life laid out in a serene, beautiful and conventional pattern of happiness, was in the course of development.

Ever since that eventful night over a week ago she had had eyes for little else than the progress of that magic filament—blurring disagreeable things in the past and present, rendering some things quite invisible, rendering Colin Currie almost invisible even while he stood beside her taking deep draughts of her with his big cow-like eyes, blurring, rendering invisible or brightening objects animate or inanimate as necessity required, making rules of conduct much easier to follow, bringing all this about, unknown to her, by its glimmer alone, by its reflected light, while all the time proceeding with its great work, every move of which she was watching, of its own volition pouncing every minute or so on some odd mystery lying about, some half speech of her parents, some remark suddenly left incomplete and drawing it into the mounting whole, the pattern to be.

For days this weaving, more like the assembling of pieces for a beautiful patch work quilt, had been before her eyes constantly. Nothing but a miracle surely could have stayed her observation of this wonderful ingather-

ing of fragments of many sorts—as it was stayed all at once that day at the Fort.

As it was stayed all at once that day at the Fort. For that was what happened. A miracle. A wind blew over the walls from the West. That was the first she knew of it. She drew a deep breath of the invigorating breeze, and immediately, the gossamer thread and its whole performance vanished out of sight and out of mind. True, as the same moment, like everyone else, she turned to the door of the Hudson Bay store which had all at once opened stiffly with a sharp, whizzing report; and, the chatter about ceasing, there ensued that lull in which angels are said to speak. What was evident, however, not a matter of hearsay, was that a young man had appeared in the doorway, wearing a red coat with brass buttons and a splendid *L'Assomption* sash. A striking young man 'of country blood', piercing eyes, dark umber skin, features defined and bold. Posed in the doorway, in broad daylight in a blaze of sunshine, his tall hat in his hand, his glossy, raven hair uncovered, a striking figure, a noble animal, a brilliant and distinct entity; who, marvel of marvels, all at once moved—he had seemed as stationary and as excellently poised as a picture—and with a few subtle strides was before Margaret, bowing and saying, 'You have been waiting sometime. Come with me.'

Astonished beyond measure, Margaret, with her brother and a score of others, followed this vivid entity into the store. Inside, the door was closed and it was quite dark, for it was a dull shop poorly lighted. The stranger was there, a slim, potent line of force. Then the

glimmer of his duskiness appeared from behind the counter right before Margaret. She was conscious of him to that extent, though she could at first see so little, conscious too of something else from the beginning much less visible, and less tangible, eclipsing entirely the usual thrill of at last having entered the commercial holy of holies where were hoarded many of the most desirable objects in the world, eclipsing everything; something invisible and intangible, more powerful than barrels of gunpowder in the corners and remaining invisible and intangible after these and much else could be distinguished; barrels of shot, guns stacked up in corners, piles of blankets, of stroud, of cotton, of silks, of velvet on the shelves, basins and saucers and trays of beads on the counters, belts and sashes depending from above.

All these things could be distinguished after one had been in the shop for a while. And from the first, the stranger, as a slim, potent line of force, then the glimmer of his duskiness as his face came right before her from behind the counter. Again all would seem to have flickering points that dazzled her; or flickering points and tiny stars would be travelling to and fro in the dimness, casting over objects and people a totally unknown spell and making the stranger one with some objects; stars that blinded rather than illuminated.

In a dazed way, where everything previously had been advancing towards greater and greater clearness, and towards a beautiful work of art, Margaret presented from her basket to the stranger with the red coat, who was waiting on her personally and exclusively, the small cotton bags which her mother had supplied for the pur-

pose, one for tea, one for sugar, one for raisins and one, smallest of all, for saleratus from the big red canister on the shelf; answering all questions regarding her requirements sanely enough yet seeming at times to confuse the attentive salesman with the big red canister of saleratus on the shelf, although they had so little in common except an all prevailing redness of covering, the red coat, the red tin, which once seemed to open up its lid and say softly 'I have been wanting to meet you,' then close softly again and glow at her with deep, piercing eyes, yet so warm as to be almost mahogany.

Finally when all their requirements had been garnered in and paid for by Don, powder and shot, and his jug filled with its measure of rum—rare was the family on the river without rum—when all who had come in with them had been served, Margaret, much confused, went out with them.

But out, from the dungeon of a store shot with stars and splinters of light only, out in the startling sunlight again, out in all the light the world ever produced, Margaret realized poignantly that it was the young man with red coat and he alone who was talking to her at her side, that subtly, again, he had left the store.

'I discovered,' he was saying quite audibly and severely, 'a hole in the bag which contains the tea—but if you keep it horizontally as I have placed it in your basket the tea will not spill.'

'Oh!' Alarmed at this information and reproof, but not looking down into the basket at all but straight into dark, piercing eyes, Margaret murmured, 'Thank you, sir.'

'I hope I do not seem,' his tones were lower but even and cold, 'to converse after matters of business have been completed. I hope to be made known to you formally at an early date. In the meantime—*au revoir.*' Bowing he turned and walked directly over to that group of Indians whom Don had said were 'The People'.

Oddly, Margaret and Donovan followed him and heard him, in a flowing, soft, clear voice, tell the red men that he was glad to see them and that he hoped they would obtain that for which they had travelled so great a distance.

At his greeting the impressive tableau came to life. A heavy murmur of pleasure rose from the whole group. Faces, apathetic with waiting long, brightened, and the chief, an old man of commanding presence, assuming a dramatic attitude, one arm stretched out, the other on his breast, gave utterance to a speech in his own language which was rendered into English by a man beside him.

'My brother, we have travelled far from our hunting grounds to see you. The Great Spirit has been kind to us and has protected us on our long journey. Beside us all the way, he has brought us safely at last in the moon of young birds into your presence.

'Our brother, we wish you to return with us. We have come for that purpose. We are encamped without in great numbers, our horses to carry you thither, our people to guard and attend you.

'Our hearts, my brother, are sore in your absence. You are honest and your counsel is like good water. Soon, my brother, I shall sleep in the earth and my people need

you. Will you not return and dwell among us, warm yourself at our fires and take food away as of yore?

'You belong in part to us, my brother, yet we do not wish you to live again the religion of Tapatamee, your mother, unless you so desire. We believe that the Great Spirit of all has made our religion good and sufficient for us, but it may not be sufficient for you. And if you have, my brother, while here, chosen a pale princess as your bride, we will be pleased to carry her thither with you, to our happy land where the plains look up to the great high hills.

'You are wise. You are brave. Your heart is as the heart of the reindeer. Your fame has travelled far, we know, yet you are still our brother, Koominah Koush.'

The chief ceased speaking. The stranger was replying, but now, because of his unhappy manner, his head lowered, his back turned, his voice halting, one could hear little, and soon even this was drowned by the voices of many pushing in from all parts of the Fort to see what was going on. A great humming filled the air. The stranger's voice was altogether lost in it, the view of the brilliantly ornate savages and of the stranger was completely blocked. Then at last when the bell from the central tower clanged noisily, announcing noon mess, annulling all other sounds but its own loud detonating, Margaret and Donovan turned away.

Outside the gate they saw again the grand riding party returning from their outing on the plains but neither sister nor brother paid much attention to them, succeeding incidents having overshadowed them and rendered quiescent the hurt dealt by one of the party. Donovan

cast one glance at that person, farthest away and told Margaret, in smug tones and with a heavy guttural growl, that that dude would never come near him again if he valued whole bones; then jangled and gurgled on, 'The Chief Trader is away in England. That Indian will be taking his place?—Chief Traders are older?—But didn't I tell you a steamboat was coming?'—but did not draw Margaret into conversation at all, until in his changing, cracked voice and with the simplicity of his years he advised:

'You should marry Colin Currie, Mag.'

'Why?' Margaret gasped, and although the sun was now burning down on them, shivered.

'Because you cannot marry both the Desjardins boys.'

'But—but Don——' to ward off a cold wave she saw approaching she put out this barrier, 'Colin Currie has never asked papa's permission to pay his addresses to me. When he does, then it will be time enough to discuss the matter.' Very loftily, though so frightened, Margaret delivered this speech.

'Never—asked—to pay——' Don echoed vaguely, puzzled by this unexpected complication in so simple a matter. 'Does he have to do that?'

'He does indeed,' Margaret declared, still with great haughtiness, though the chilling suspicion that Colin Currie was the actual person selected by her mother remained, her barrier of words ineffective so far as she herself was concerned. Don would never have mentioned Colin if it had not been thus foreordained, and while it was true that Colin Currie had not approached her father, that could be brought about easily enough.

Their mother was at the back door stirring a barrel of soft soap with a paddle when they appeared. 'The time of your coming back,' she admonished.

Margaret looked at her penetratingly, after they went inside, too, and her mother was checking off the purchases. Why had Don brought up the matter of Colin? From whom would he obtain the idea, if not from their mother? And if her mother had this design, what could be done about it? Angus Currie, the family's fairy godfather.

'How much the tea?'

'Three shillings and sixpence the pound.'

'It takes the very heart out of one.'

'The sugar?'

'One shilling the pound.'

'The raisins?'

'Five pence the half pound.'

'Did you see Mistress Dunbar?'

'Yes, mamma.'

'What would she be wearing?'

'She wore a bonnet—in the new pattern.'

'Sure, it's dressing her food she'll be soon, the same as the Colony Governor. Did you see anything of the Governor's lady?'

'Governor Patterson is still indisposed, mamma—and we did not see his lady.'

'It's a tolerable good meal he'll be giving Sir James,' Don said sadly.

'Tsh—you think of naught but your stomach—and now tell me, did Mistress Dunbar wear a hoop skirt in the new fashion?'

Many questions of that sort her mother asked, which Margaret for her part answered well enough considering her unprecedented feelings.

Unprecedented and conflicting feelings. Warm, delightfully warm waves, then dashing cold waves—whisking out of sight a beautiful work of art in the making.

Chapter VII

THOSE unprecendented and conflicting emotions, those hot and cold waves lashed about Margaret for days without mercy, until at last one fine evening it appeared as if the worst wave of all had won. With dull eyes she was looking in the direction of the setting sun once more. Somewhere out in the big rolling plains was her father (perhaps her uncle) advancing towards the east. Not a matter of imagination now. Her father at last was coming and would arrive shortly. All signs pointed to that. He was out there somewhere though she could not see him. She would not be able to see him unless he were very near. She told herself the truth now. Why pretend she could see him when the billowy plains a short distance away swallowed everything, flowers, bluffs, sloughs, everything, human beings, if any? The prairie was like a huge, woolly beast, crouching, omnivorous, devouring everything in sight. After a while it would devour the sun itself, whose blood would then flow back over the beast; later drench the sky.

It was useless to strain one's eyes. And no human being popped into sight near at hand; but mosquitoes popped about in swarms. This was sufficient reason, if no other, for Margaret to leave abruptly, long before the sacrifice of the sun had begun. Hurrying back to the house she was followed by a cloud of insects. She escaped within and sat down beside the open screened window, her hands in her lap.

Out in the barnyard, that pungent, miry enclosure, wherein were the byre, pig and henhouse, one building formed of poles, with three compartments, her mother was milking the cow. Don was making a smudge of sticks and grass to drive away the mosquitoes. Her mother was using a switch for the same purpose as she milked. Luke was barking. Don was scolding him.

Margaret could hear all this faintly and forced herself to think of each item and others in a painstaking manner. Patrick, Robert and Timothy had gone upstream in a dug-out to Mistress Denny's, to exchange some milk for barm, to be used as yeast for bread.

Papa must be coming *very* soon. Mamma made yeast bread only when he was expected. Not always then, but never at any other time. After having so long subsisted on the 'pot-luck of the plains' a diet of meat, exclusively, chiefly pemmican, mamma realized that he would appreciate a change, in spite of what he was accustomed to say.

Everything was ready except the bread. In the house everything had a very clean appearance. Her mother had scrubbed the floor with ashes until it was very white. During these days of preparations Margaret herself had been steadily engaged, much more so than ordinarily, tossing many tasks of a light sort to an easy completion and each time being rather surprised at herself, feeling that she could have done much more and her health in no way injured—if it had been allowed—but if she should tan or sprout even the tiniest freckle, or if her hands should be other than very white and very soft, it would be a tragedy.

However, there was nothing to do now. Everything had been done. She might now continue her needlework. But no, she did not wish to sew. She did not wish to do anything.

But she *must* gladden herself again, as she had been gladdened a short time ago, she the possessor of a delightful secret. She must bring before her eyes again the magic gold thread which had been assembling and joining together so well all those puzzling patches of family life. Perhaps the pattern had been nearly completed, would be when her uncle arrived with her father.

What a surprise for the boys! What great rejoicing! What a happy time was near at hand! One should think of that and how grateful papa would be to find them all well and prospering.

How engaging was the prospect outside. The wheat was quite high. Papa would be pleased to see Donovan's wheat, his first. How lovely everything was about! What is rarer than a day in June! All the trees had now their full foliage, even the oaks, the last to unfold.

Truly the wild plum and cherry blossoms were all gone, but to replace them on the river slopes the high bush cranberry and the drooping dogwood willow graciously nodded, white and heavy with bloom. So they would nod and curtsey to papa when he came. And although the wild strawberries had ripened and they had gathered a great quantity, there was still a great quantity to be gathered if papa wished any.

One must think of these things, and if papa could see what she was seeing now merely by peeping out of

the window up and down—flocks of wool in the sky—delicate puffings—the river flowing clearly, one portion, a pool of greenish bronze where the water on the other side swirled into a cove.

It was all beautiful. She should be happy. She might fetch her needlework at least. If she had something to do.

But she did not 'fetch' her needlework. She appeared to have no taste whatever for that work nor that of the gold thread. She rose indeed but walked stressfully about the room, looking at the daguerreotype of her father, at the clock, at the old sea chest, as if again seeking something from them, something quite different from before, some childish, placid joy perhaps.

But it would not come to her.

Never again, never again—but in its place, that ache. She looked out again at the sky, the trees, the river and felt more deeply still that ache. It was useless for her to seek the beauties of nature for her own good. Her father might like them, but they pained her. It was of no avail. Her old quiet intercourse with trees, with water, with the plains, with the sunset was no more. It seemed indeed as if some inner fibres of her being that she had not known she possessed, had lately been bared of their protective padding and the most exquisite sights and sounds played on them with greatest pain.

But she must try to think of something, her father's absence again, his coming home, of Harry that evening and the shock he had given them, of the blow dealt their pride on the way to the Fort, of happenings at the Fort.

She felt keenly still about that hole in the tea bag

which the Acting Trader had discovered, he of all people! How had that escaped mamma's vigilance, and what would he think of them, having holes in their tea bags. Margaret had since mended the hole neatly but she still felt mortified about it and countless times she had revisualized the incident. Over and over again she saw herself presenting the little bags one after another, one for tea, one for sugar, all the while the big red canister of saleratus staring at her—and again and again that presence had spoken those few words, which she had thought issued from the canister, not so much like speech as breath merely—as if she had been in deep sleep with sable night all around and had been awakened by some object in the room saying something—associated finally with the eyes of the new official at the Fort, as if the eyes had said, 'I have been wanting to meet you.'

The curious thing was that he, the man himself, with his lips had expressed the same thought, virtually, there was no doubt of that, and in the full sunlight, but in so different a manner, in so perfunctory a manner, then had gone off in so practical a way.

All of that, over and over again—and the speech of the Indians. What ceremonious Indians they were, how courteous the chief, yet how sad! The sadness of the chief bore down on her, affected her deeply still. Might that account for all her feelings since; and what had he meant when he said that 'Koominah Koush' might bring back with him a pale princess as his bride?

However it did not concern her.

Don had frightened her greatly on the way home, speaking as he had, of Colin Currie. And she was still

frightened. She could see no manner of avoiding a marriage with him, if her mother had so designed it—possibly Angus Currie, too, his father.

She could do nothing. Nothing.

Don had heard nothing concerning this 'Koominah Koush' as 'The People' had called him, which meant 'like a pine tree'; whether or not he had returned to his former residence with the Indians.

However it was of no moment.

But how could he leave until Chief Trader Marshall returned from England? It would be wrong for him to leave before that, especially when the Governor was ill. One might consider Koominah Koush now the Chief Factor and indeed he was dressed for the part.

However it was of no moment.

It was of course Don's account, that he was taking Chief Trader Marshall's place. Don might be wrong.

——How had that hole escaped the attention of her mother and herself?

However, it was ridiculous to be thinking about that. She would never see him again in all likelihood and he would never again see a hole in any of their bags. Never again.

He had gone away. Sir James too, to think of something sensible, had probably departed on his tour of the Company's posts. They had heard nothing of him, except that a week ago mamma had been invited to an affair in his honour at Bishop's Court, an invitation which she had declined.

At supper this evening, her sleeves rolled up, she had said abruptly that doubtless Sir James was not coming to

see them this year as usual, that doubtless he was done paying his respects to the indigent.

A speech that had steeped Margaret, always so depressed, in perplexed desolation. It was regrettable indeed that mamma had not been able to continue the associations she had so enjoyed while living at the Fort. She spoke of that time, a very short time, often.

She was obliged to work so hard and they had had so much trouble. And there was nothing Margaret could do to help. Nothing.

It was a world of negations. Now she did not wish to do anything. 'I do not wish to do anything. I do not wish to do anything,' she began to repeat to herself, dolefully walking rapidly about the room; at last sinking down into a corner on a bench where the ache descended on her a hundredfold, that black mournful ache. What was it? What did it mean? Why was living itself pure pain?

She was looking straight ahead of her, her eyes staring, meaningless, having relinquished utterly the effort to explain anything, having relinquished all effort at self comfort, all effort to follow any rule of conduct whatever, defeated, blank, when she heard her mother descend to the cellar, a small excavation beneath the house with an entrance from outside. She was setting the milk in the wooden basins.

Suddenly she hurried up the steps and came into the house by the rear door.

'Put by your work,' she whispered hoarsely to Margaret (who had no work). 'Go smooth yourself. Someone is coming.'

Margaret fled to her room. A visitor. Could it be? Who could it be? Formerly she had not met her mother's visitors.

She brushed her hair swiftly, tied it with a fresh ribbon, put on her best moccasins, smoothed out her pale blue sateen gown.

How wretched she looked! The Lily of Fort Garry! She ran about flustered. Never had she looked so bad. Would it not be better to change to the green gown sprigged with pink flowers, the one she had worn that day at the Fort?

She would do that.

But there was no time.

'Come,' her mother called in a vehement aside.

It was hopeless. She had to go—in the blue. She went, issuing from her room just as her mother was drawing over her shoulders, over her old, soiled, patched gown her large, silky cashmere shawl; the next minute presenting herself at the front door and receiving with great composure, Sir James Cameron and—the man whom Margaret and Donovan had met on the way to the Fort!

Chapter VIII

'I HAVE taken the liberty, madam, of bringing a countryman of yours to see you.' Entering as an old friend, the Governor introduced 'Mr. Cecil Johnson.'

'A most unexpected pleasure,' Elizabeth Moore said.

'Ah—your daughter, too—Ah—a young lady—Miss Moore, allow me to present Mr. Johnson.'

'Will you be seated, gentlemen.' The hostess indicated the one chair for Sir James and a bench for the exquisite Mr. Johnson, both in brave riding habiliments.

'I was most anxious,' the latter said after acknowledging the introduction, bowing deeply, 'to have the opportunity of meeting the Moores.'

'It is a great pleasure,' Elizabeth Moore crossed her maroon and amber tinted shawl with a gesture of extreme leisureliness, 'to see Sir James each year and to meet his friends.'

'As you already know, madam,' Mr. Johnson proceeded, 'I encountered your daughter a few days ago, and I was bold enough to enquire her name, since, immediately on seeing her, I was struck by her resemblance to a family of Moores I have the honour of knowing in Ireland.'

'Indeed, sir. But you are, I fear, in error, if you connect us with your acquaintances of our name. My husband has no relatives of his name, of any name, indeed, in Ireland, none whatever.' Drawing herself very erect,

the hostess clasped her shawl with a firm grace; at the same time darted a glance of decorous astonishment towards her daughter.

Neither Margaret nor Donovan had described the meeting with Sir James and his party in detail. Succeeding events had, in Margaret especially, greatly reduced the substance of that meeting. Neither had her mother invited a more exact account, although so pleased to hear of the great man in any connection. Now learning more—nothing had been said concerning a Mr. Johnson at all, or any strange gentleman in the party—she delivered that swift yet careful look of surprise towards Margaret; in whom the chief effect was to revive the memory of Mr. Johnson's offence—that, in a daughter already depressed, one who had just dropped from the crest of a great expectation to a much lower level. From which, however, to do her full justice, she was making a gallant effort to rise, to something of her mother's sudden gentility.

From the beginning, even in her depths, Margaret could not but observe the transformation in her mother, how gracious she had become on the instant, how handsome, how graceful, the enveloping shawl outlining her figure so softly, its russet, brown and amber shades blending so well with her brown hair and brown eyes. Her whole manner and appearance so charming. A noble impulse urged Margaret to match her mother's manner if at all possible. A well-bred daughter in company on an adult basis, she felt it important too, that she should demonstrate her aptitude. But it must be confessed, that she succeeded on the whole poorly, what with one un-

happy memory or another, offering to the gaze of society, in fact, during almost the whole of the interview a manner of forced interest; or of armed neutrality directed towards Mr. Johnson, that wealthy gentleman (news obtained by Don) who had happened in the settlement at the same time as the Governor, who had a few days ago taken a score of servants, a great amount of baggage, guns, ponies and provisions and had gone out on the plains to hunt, in the fashion of a prince. Don had laughed greatly over the matter and over the fact that he had taken 'a bath' with him, a singular contrivance which Don had described.

'I regret, madam, if I have made an unwelcome suggestion,' Mr. Johnson apologized, 'but I assure you the name is a most distinguished one in Mallyhall, esteemed for its noble sons and for the beauty of its daughters—and Miss Moore (inclining towards her) I trust I do not embarrass her by the observation, resembles to a remarkable degree the portait of one Margaret Moore, renowned for her beauty, hanging in the Castle of Mallyhall.'

'You do us a great honour,' still with that bridling curvet of neck and shoulders and bringing her mellowed shawl closer to her throat, Elizabeth Moore replied, 'but I know of no such relationship. Should you however be of a mind to make further enquiry, I can only refer you to my husband who will be home shortly.'

Mr. Johnson stroked his black beard precisely and, as if he had forgotten his own words and had not heard her mother's, stared at Margaret.

'Mr. Johnson, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting since my arrival in Fort Garry, may have erred,

madam, in thinking your husband's family related to the one he has in mind, but I am bound to confess, that since seeing your daughter he has talked of little else. In fact I believe he has relinquished the pleasure of the chase in this noble land sooner than he would otherwise have done, in order to make your acquaintance. And he is, I feel sure, delighted to view with his own eyes such rare beauty—such unexpected beauty and breeding in our wild West.'

'Sir James,' Elizabeth Moore lifted her hand in a pretty, deprecating fashion, 'was always a great flatterer.'

'Veritas simplex oratio est,' Sir James pronounced, inclining slightly.

'Aequam memento rebus in ardius servare mentem,' Mr. Johnson quoted not to be outdone, plunging upward into the conversation once more, at the same time plunging into the air a large silk handkerchief, loaded with musk, 'I regard it as a truly happy circumstance to have the opportunity of enjoying under any pretext whatever, if ever so briefly, the society of yourself and your charming daughter. And at least you yourself as well as your husband were born in Ireland?'

'Oh, yes, indeed, sir. Alas my poor country—my poor, poor country! We have our troubles in this new land, as you know so well Sir James, but nothing so disastrous as the terrible famine which has so devastated Ireland.'

'It was indeed a disastrous happening. Yet Ireland has well recovered—and has advanced as never before. Indeed there is now a telepraph from London to Dublin and messages can be sent any time on wires.'

'On wires! A curious method, indeed. I had not

heard of it. I do not hear of these things,' Elizabeth Moore expressed a polite interest. 'I hear very little of my neighbours even. Indeed,' coughing delicately and drawing her shawl delicately about her knees now, 'Indeed—I, myself, rarely leave the house, except for purposes of air.'

'We live in a great age, madam,' Sir James cleared his throat ominously, his eyes saddened and his voice issued a dull, weighty drone. 'We live in a great age. Coaches and boats are now operated by steam. Speech is transmitted by electricity—and a new planet has been discovered in the sky. Wonders untold—and the world so full of land hunger—land hunger. New areas being settled everywhere in our hemisphere. In spite of ourselves we are being cast in an entirely different mould. I regret it. I regret it. I like the good old days—and the old ways of travelling. But this year, the other day even, cutting through the deep forests of Canada West—a railway has been opened for traffic—through the deepest forest.'

'In recounting, Sir James,' Mr. Johnson intoned sweetly, taking advantage of a slightly rhetorical pause in the Governor's dirge, 'do not forget,' tapping his lips with his scented handkerchief, 'in recounting to the ladies the marvels of our age, do not forget to tell them of the great Hippodrome in Paris.'

'Quite so. Quite so,' Sir James agreed shortly, 'a very fine circus indeed—but as I was about to say—in that great forest to the east of us here, towns and villages are springing up overnight, carved out of the woods—carved out of the woods,' he repeated with dull joy, hitting on

an entirely new metaphor—'and all are being joined together by iron bands—iron bands, I say—and who knows, madam, who knows I say, but at some time not far distant Prince Rupert's Land itself may be joined to Canada by those same iron bands, and great iron horses may thunder into Fort Garry.'

Again Elizabeth Moore brought her shawl about her tightly, eagerly almost, glad of any slight opportunity offered to keep her soiled patched gown covered, as well as slightly surprised and wholly incredulous. 'Iron horses —sir—? Ah, you mean the large black engines—I have heard, sir, but I do not believe—I cannot believe it.'

'God forbid, but it may well be. It may well be,' Sir James fittingly dejected, pleased with the climax and its effect on the ladies and having surpassed himself in originality continued, 'It may well be—I may not live to see it but——' His voice dropped to a husky zero and in the chill silence he turned and drearily viewed a figure suddenly darkening the doorway, the figure of a stable boy.

'Didn't thim lads come back—at all—at all?' the apparition bawled into the room. Donovan, barefooted, tattered clothing, horrent hair, producing a loud and alarming brogue. 'Didn't thim brats—By gum,' he exploded under his breath, Margaret heard him, *'that noodle?'*

His mother went to the door. 'Be gone with you,' ordering him off in a clear voice as if he were a servant. Don went. She returned with a mincing step and sat down with invalidish languor. 'You take too gloomy a

view, perhaps, Sir James. Let us hope that your dire prophecies may not be fulfilled entirely.'

'I very much fear, madam—I very much—I am getting old—and I confess I do not like the new ways. But I need not trouble myself. I need not trouble myself. Doubtless I shall not live to see our great West despoiled.'

He rose stiffly. 'And now, madam, we will bid you good evening. Will you be so good, madam, as to tell the Major, should he return shortly, that I should like to see him?'

'I shall be delighted, sir. If he should miss you this year, he should regret it exceedingly.'

'Indeed, madam, it is always a great pleasure for me to see you each year—to see you and your children well. They are well?'

'Very well indeed, sir, I thank you.'

'Your father,' the Governor said kindly to Margaret, 'has been away some time.'

'Yes, indeed, sir. Night after night far out in the open plains he establishes his lonely bivouac.'

'Ah, yes,' rather startled, staring at her oddly, then smiling, 'Ah, yes, my child.'

'I hope, sir,' Elizabeth Moore, mindful of the civilities enquired, 'you have found the affairs of the Company at Fort Garry prospering?'

'Quite so, madam. And we have now in charge a young man who, though young, is conducting the affairs of the Company most admirably in the unavoidable absence of our esteemed Marshall—and our young officer has, I am gratified to say, consented to remain with us here for the whole year, although he has other alluring

offers. After that I am hoping to be able to place him here permanently.'

'A most admirable official,' Mr. Johnson commented.

'But I fear, madam, we have been overlong——?'

'Oh, no, indeed, Sir James—it is a great pleasure——'

'It has been most agreeable,' Mr. Johnson took leave elegantly, 'to me, Mistress Moore to have met you and your charming daughter—and I too shall be delighted to converse with Major Moore when he returns.' Bowing deeply he retired towards the door.

After more complimentary adieux and more bowing, and after Sir James had taken a shrewd appraising glance around the room, the two courtly gentlemen withdrew—the hostess at the door clasping her rich drapery around her with a final gesture of distinction; suggestive, too, of a lady delicately reared fearing the ill-effects of the evening air.

Chapter IX

AFTER the visitors had gone Elizabeth Moore held this posture for some minutes, her eyes bright, her face flushed, and when she spoke again it was in the same warm tones she had employed in Sir James' and Mr. Johnson's presence.

'You encountered Mr. Johnson on your way to the Fort?'

'Yes, mamma.'

'He was mounted?'

'Yes, mamma. He was with Sir James and the others, the riding party we spoke of.'

'Oh, indeed.' She appeared to reflect on this, in the manner of one reflecting on an important incident previously neglected; to reflect both with satisfaction and with dissatisfaction, withal correctly. 'Mr. Johnson,' with a touch of resentment, 'made bold to address you? In what way may I enquire?'

'He enquired my name?'

'Nothing further?'

'He enquired Donovan's name.'

'Nothing further?'

'No, mamma.'

'What business of his?' Suddenly she cast off all politeness. Margaret, now in a rapture on her own account, all the depression of the early part of the evening quite gone, was hoping her mother's pretty demeanour

would continue for ever. But with that 'What business is it of his, I'd like to know?' she cast it off rudely—and the shawl. Folding the latter impatiently she restored it to the old sea chest near the fireplace and came rapidly to the door.

'It's a good trimming those boys need—not here yet with the barm.' A strained, set expression on her face, she left the house and went towards the river.

Margaret sat down again by the window in the phosphorescent gloaming. It was nearing the longest day of the year, and the sky untouched by clouds, dark or fleecy, had a clear, sapphire luminosity. Filtering in on her, it toned her hair, her skin, electrically, threw her blue sateen gown into a radiant greenish mass, and showed her eyes, bright with a wonderful illumination.

A wonderful illumination, from within, even more than from without. Eyes filled with the interest in the visit of Sir James and Mr. Johnson, which, at first feigned, had at the last become so real that now the whole interview glowed in reminiscence genuinely. Genuinely. The whole interview.

Wrapped in her voluminous shawl and appearing so beautiful, her mother had acquitted herself with utmost fitness. Her deportment had been all that could have been desired, all that Mistress Toll could have desired. She did wish Simone had been present to see how mamma had drawn her shawl about her—*l'air gêné,* the touch she had affected had been especially well rendered. If the Acting Factor, as Margaret now continually thought of Koominah Koush, had met mamma this evening and

seen her at her best—it might—it might—it might at least have cancelled the bad effect of that hole in the tea bag. It was to be hoped that, when that gentlemen would call, mamma would receive him as graciously as she had received Sir James and Mr. Johnson. When *he* would call. He was to remain a year. He had not returned with the Indians from afar. He must remain in charge here at least a year. It was his duty. 'His duty —his duty' she repeated to herself—all at once, a statue of severity, gazing out and up into the even, luminous blue of the sky, her hair, her face, captured by a steady beam of that long twilight, enshrined in it, lost in it, coming to life at last with a deep sigh.

To return to the present, one was forced to acknowledge that Mr. Johnson had this evening conducted himself most admirably. His mode of expression had been most tactful, his manner most courteous. One could not fail to note, too, his profound and cultivated obeisance in parting. It ill behoved her, a novice in such matters, to criticize a gentleman whose obeisance in parting had been so profound and cultivated.

As for the Governor, he had been as always most urbane, most kind, and this evening his address lofty in the extreme.

Altogether the interview had been most artistic. It had points of similarity, indeed—this occurred to her with a tremor of deep excitement—to that elevated conference between the Indians at the Fort and the young Factor; the same ceremony, the same fine words in both parleys, the Indians in most gorgeous apparel, the visitors of the evening in splendid equestrian attire. And mamma too,

had exhibited the same pride as the savage chief had exhibited, with that sort of naked grandeur, which was so impressive.

Mamma's cultivated manner——

One was proud of mamma, although obliged to acknowledge that, what the Indian chief had expressed, the high esteem in which Koominah Koush was held among them, was much more important than anything she had said, who indeed had merely filled in time, becomingly. Much more becomingly than anything Sir James or Mr. Johnson had said. Except at the last when they had both touched on the same matter. 'The same matter,' she murmured, again becoming a statue—of hope—gazing out and up into the even, luminous blue of the sky, her hair, her face, still captured by that steady beam of the long twilight, enshrined in it, a statue again, until roused by Don, this time, springing in lightly and galloping up the ladder to his sleeping apartment, calling out, 'Putting on style, eh?'

A slightly jarring note, if anything now could jar. Don had curious sayings. One did not know where he gleaned them. 'By gum.' And he even went so far as to maintain that the people dwelling on the rivers, even the best educated, did not employ modern speech. We were 'behindhand' in that particular, he had declared, as in so many others. A most singular idea. She could not give it credence. And how deplorable Don's appearing at the door in his worn garments and shouting in an exaggerated brogue! If he had had the good luck to be wearing papa's clothes—since he had no fine clothes of his

own. When visitors came in the future it was to be hoped——

However Sir James did not know Don, and, perhaps, always hoping for the best, he had taken him for the ploughboy; and perhaps Mr. Johnson had not recognized Don at all, had likewise taken him for the ploughboy. In that case no great harm had been done.

Both Sir James and Mr. Johnson were fine gentlemen. It was unnecessary now for Don to think of carrying out any of the threats he had made concerning Mr. Johnson. It were politest never to refer again to that gentleman's unsuited remark (Don had been appearing so fine that day) since it was evident that the reason for Mr. Johnson's coming to-day was to make it clear that he did not consider them an uncouth family. *C'est tout autre chose.* He wished to make that clear and to show his regret for inadvertent words; by claiming to see a resemblance between their family, a palpable excuse, and a distinguished family of their name in Ireland whom he knew, a claim which served well enough his purpose.

Mamma had not altogether liked Mr. Johnson. Indeed there might still be something about him. But mamma, of course, did not know of his unfortunate remark and did not see in his visit and his words the apology intended.

And as for that, when one came to examine the real reason for his halting before them and his remark to *her,* were not that reason and his remark flattering? And was there not something to-day in the accepted way in which he spoke of her (resembling a great beauty) that reflected not only his opinion but the general opinion?

It was not a new idea to her, her beauty. She had been brought up to it, as she had been brought up to consider herself a delicate piece of china surrounded by much heavy porcelain. But in connection with the most recent event the same idea induced in her now a heady sensation. A wild vanity palpitated through her, which she shortly recognized as vanity and sought to suppress. So supreme a conceit of oneself was not according to Rules of Conduct, to say nothing of the tenets of religion.

She was doing her best to be at least calmer and more composed, when a clamour of voices rose from the riverside. Patrick, Robert and Timothy had returned in a boat. Her mother was scolding them—so late—and the bread to set yet, and they should all be in their beds.

There was truly no reason, Margaret was urging herself, setting herself against vanity and all its works, why she should imagine Koominah Koush had noticed her appearance at all. He had had no opportunity of viewing her until he had come right up to her. In the store it had been so dark, a weird atmosphere, of ghostly whispers, and outside again he had been occupied with his kinsmen and not with her at all. She was foolish. She was exaggerating. She had no reason to feel so elated.

Naturally it cheered one to see different company, gentlemen who spoke well of everyone. She felt much better—and that was all she needed to feel. If in the course of the year which Sir James had said the young man was to be at the Fort he should show that he had noticed her, there might then be some excuse for palpitations.

Her brothers and her mother were nearing the house.

The boys were talking noisily. They had seen and heard Mrs. Denny's parrot for the first time.

'Hold your tongues, everyone.' Berating them soundly, their mother advanced, her arms full of the broken wood she had been gathering on the bank. A heavily loaded beast of burden, she went to the back of the house, shortly came in with the boys, ragged and unkempt; and in a harsh voice without airs or graces directed Patrick to fetch the basin from the cupboard, Robert to light a candle——

Chapter X

PADDLING over in her canoe in the morning Madeleine brought a pail of gelettes of her own making and important news, of another's. An Indian who had travelled all night had told her that a party of plain hunters were camped at White Hill and would be at the Fort in the morning. Among them were Collettes and Bassons and 'a big man, good horse.'

'Oh, papa, at last,' Margaret exclaimed. 'This is the day!'

'Dat—Majeur Moore,' Madeleine's parchment skin folded into smiles and her small black eyes sparkled. 'Him—come now—for money—he get for fight—and make hurt the arm.'

Mamma thanked Madeleine for the gelettes and gave her a pailful of fresh milk, and Madeleine left, her short fat body rolling with haste and happiness.

Mamma made no comment on Madeleine's surmises with regard to papa's pension, and her news appeared to be no news. Mamma had risen very early, had worked the puffy dough into loaves, had made a fire in the clay oven outside, and when the loaves were twice their size she had raked out the coals and thrust in the bread. She had churned, too, and Margaret had been allowed to form the new butter into golden rolls with wooden patties. Another batch of foaming milk had been set to cool in the cellar and emptied basins washed and scalded.

Breakfast was hurried but thoroughly relished. Fresh gelettes dipped in bowls of new buttermilk, clotted with butter. Madeleine's gelettes were better than their own bannock though of similar ingredients exactly. Was that because she made them over a fire on the ground in the open air? She disliked the clay oven outside and the fireplace inside equally for cooking. Both to her were artificial means of supplying heat. Even in extremely cold weather she could be seen building her blaze on the ground and bringing forth a large, long-handled pan, containing often a whole fish, which would blossom forth over her flame so crisp on the outside, so flaky within.

In high excitement the boys ate and talked. Would papa bring them presents? Would they go to meet him? Would he give them a ride on his horse?

'Hold your peace. Margaret and Donovan are going to meet him.'

Margaret's lips forming each second some phrase of pleasure were very still at this news—news as well as the fact that her father (and her uncle) were coming this morning with a party. She was to go with Donovan. Her lips ceased to move but her eyes leapt with light.

They were not long in preparing themselves in their best, yet none too soon. Hardly were they outside when they heard those sounds so faint at first, but easily recognizable, the ungreased axles of plain hunters' ox-carts moaning on their wooden pins. To unaccustomed ears the most mournful of tunes (the original, one such ear was sure, of the tune the old cow died of—the origin of

the phrase), but to Margaret and Donovan, this morning, it was assuredly the soul of their neighbours evolving; and the brightest announcement. For a particular cadence, a sharper note, something, convinced them from the beginning that some of that mixture of creaking, grating and moaning issued from the ox-carts of Bassons and Collettes—whom their father must have met homeward bound.

A grand jubilee of dissonance soon, the spirit of many hunters flashing forward, all to be added to that of the numbers of other wild and semi-wild people already encamped on the plains. The liveliest and busiest season of the year; and still another band rolling in to pitch their light abodes on the edge of that already swarming hive of activity, that city of tepees outside the Fort.

The sounds, the lamentations of wood on wood, grew until the very ground itself seemed to shriek, and people from houses along the way were rushing out. 'Plain hunters! plain hunters!' they called. The blurred darkness on the horizon grew and grew, advanced and resolved itself into a long, draggling column, seen aslant. Then Donovan could no longer contain himself. Nor retain all of his coverings. Shouting, throwing his stately hat in the air, catching it swiftly, he urged Margaret on, all in the same breath.

They hurried. Flowers on the wayside, wild roses in bloom everywhere cast their perfume on an air deserted by the brother and sister as quickly as possible—for the dearer air of their own flesh and blood. Rapidly they pushed on, Margaret now and again dropping all adult technique whatever and running like a deer with

Donovan. So fast that they drew into the camping ground with the first of the newcomers, men on ponies, sashes afloat, swaying carts, boxes on two wheels, piled high with tents, staggering under their loads of buffalo in various forms, others replete with women and children, and all draped with utensils that had added not a little to the linked jangling of the long caravan; composed of hunters from the colony on the meeting rivers and of many others from tiny half-breed settlements on the plains, come to the Fort to trade, to visit, to see and to rejoice.

Among shuffling ponies, barking of dogs, shouts of humans and carts coming to rest with final whinings of thanksgiving, Margaret and Donovan looked for their father. Joseph and Peter Legroux alighted beside them in bright capotes with guns and knives. Marie Gagnon, Rose Fortier, Clarice Ducharme, trim as boys in fringed skin smocks and neat leggings, descended from carts nearby, whence were extracted soon several papooses, immediately clapped to the backs of brothers and sisters or otherwise deposited or hung up out of danger. Two priests, Father Simard and Father Berneche, guardians of their faith during the chase, dropped from nearby ponies.

Among all these dusky people with the freshness of plain winds still on their faces and moving about with the grace of prairie elk, the eyes of Margaret and Donovan darted in search of a large fair man 'of pure transatlantic blood'. Margaret would be running in and out among carts with a most regrettable informality when she would suddenly remember; then advance for a time with stately, little mincing steps, expecting every

moment to be beside her father (at least). But at last when the ground occupied by the latest arrivals had been covered without success, Margaret and Donovan stood looking into each other's eyes blankly. Could it be that he had not come at all?

A group of those who had sons and daughters at school or at the convent in the settlement were setting out to see them. Many were making their way already to the Fort with staples from the hunt. Carts of their neighbours and others proceeding to their homes along the rivers were taking up their weird supplications again. Paraphernalia all around was being unpacked, cluttering the ground. Don was peering around a heap of goods when a huge leather feather bed was shot from a nearby cart, knocking him down. But he picked himself up immediately, and, spurred anew by this blow, rushed once more to the search, with Margaret; and together they examined more and more groups and individuals, in vain, until at last they dared not look at each other.

They were staring ahead when they saw the young man in the red coat, who had befriended them at the Fort, advancing towards them with a resilient tread, Margaret's eyes found his eagerly. His attitude was reassuring, his serenity calming, even before he spoke, raising his tall hat and holding it in his hand.

'Major Moore is talking with Angus Currie—over there. See. If you wish I might go with you.'

'I see him. I see him.' Don called abruptly and dashed off.

Margaret lingered, thanked their informant, breathlessly, with face illuminated; then followed on.

Their father's back was turned—a plain hunter too. Dressed as a plain hunter—with the most brilliant sash! Yet so different. Immediately so different. Or so very much more so? How could it be that they had not seen him at once? A noticeable figure anywhere, full-fleshed and upstanding; and even as he stood with his back turned, his hand on his horse, casting abroad the flavour of a fine, free dashing career as did none of the others who were born to it.

At the moment he was having a somewhat heated discussion with Angus Currie, but veering about at Donovan's call, the fire of argument left his face, and uttering a cry he swept Margaret into his arms—then placed a finely paternal hand on Donovan's shoulder.

'Well, well, my boy—and Maggie—is this Maggie?'

She was down on the ground again and he was looking at her, tears in his eyes and in his plangent voice. 'So this is Maggie. My little Maggie.'

A second of swelling pride, then with concern. 'I did not think to see you so soon—out of breath, eh?—and Currie on me tail, too. Sure I'll gather up. Don, hold Adam.'

A few steps away Angus Currie stood with one foot on a large, a very large package on the ground; like a powerful dog who has followed the scent, made captive the prey and guards it with a huge paw. A full red, lower lip quivering as with the pleasure of a deed well done added a genuine bloodhound savour.

Major Moore waved a lofty hand towards the package, encased in birch rind. 'I will leave these furs, then, as you suggest, as you mildly suggest, sir—or I shall take

them with me—and see you later.' Drawing himself up he gave the tenacious Currie the full benefit of his fine military bearing. 'Which is it to be, sir?'

'Leave the skins, Major. I'll have a value put on them.' Bringing up his lower lip with steady, firm determination.

'Very well, sir. Good-day, sir.' Pointing to a large carpet bag on the ground. 'Bear a hand, Don. Put the bag on the horse.'

'We have money, sir, to make a payment—the sparings from the egg money,' Don spoke up.

'That suits him. That suits him,' the Major declared gustily. 'These traders have their fashion—I say, my boy —I have notion to walk. Take Adam, my bag and gun and ride on——'

Without speaking so pleased he was, Don vaulted to the horse, with the bag and the gun, and, swinging in and out among the crowd and their belongings heaped everywhere, with the ease of an expert, was quickly gone.

Father and daughter shaped their way out more slowly. More carts were being demobilized and their contents displayed for private sale. In theory it was not done. One did not buy or sell furs except through the medium of the Hudson Bay Company. In actual fact and openly it was done. Every year the company of 'free-traders' grew until in the late fifties it included almost everyone in the country, and out of the country, on occasions at least.

To-day were on exhibition for any who might like to purchase, moccasins, mittens, powder pouches, shot belts and much else, all work of half-breed women, beautifully

wrought and embroidered. Buffalo robes with gay linings and listing in matching colours, dyed feathers, lank of sinews, the thread of the country, were there in abundance. All this for the outer man. A gay bazaar of the West, as gay as any of the East. And for the inner man, various preparations and parts of buffalo, bags of pemmican, dried and smoked tongues, berry pemmican (in which Saskatoon berries were richly embedded), bales of dried meat, smoked beaver tails, equal to fish on fast days since the beaver keeps his tail constantly in the water—and many other delicacies.

Margaret came along beside all this with her father, trailing on his arm, wearing the *petit pardessus* over the green gown sprigged with pink flowers, the green bonnet, itself a calyx, in which was set that best flower of all, her face, from which peeped forth her eyes, earnestly and steadily as only the eyes of flowers can peep forth. Impossible not to compare her to a flower. 'The Lily of Fort Garry'. After all the rector's horticultural suggestions were only part of the universal manner.

A superb flower. A superb day for the flower. Her world, holding light, warmth, dew in perfect proportions. And perfect scenery. For, if there were any better sight than stretches of rolling plains on one side and tree-banked rivers on the other, Margaret did not know of it —with perhaps a glimpse of St. Boniface Cathedral across from the walls of Fort Garry, a windmill rising from the trees, a small white house lying in among them, and this life of the plains focused here around her, the bright bazaar flaunting Indian colours, vermilion, royal blue, yellow, maroon. Expanse of green all round fusing

all, and above the sky so blue, so vivid, one's own sky. Her world holding not only warmth, light, dew, colour and pleasing objects well disposed, but filled as well with regard of one's friends, affection of relatives—her father beside her.

All this Margaret was feeling and much else, the family life again being laid out in a beautiful design. Since last night she had been feeling that way again, feeling new elements entering into the pattern, enriching it, and the gold thread——

Beginning to think of her gold thread, that idea she had fancied for her father's mission, beginning to wonder what would be its part in a larger plan, she suddenly stood still. *Her uncle was not with her father!*

How singular of her! How curious that she should not have thought of it, of him, the long sought uncle until this minute!

Gasping in amazement at herself, forgetting, gasping at herself that she should not be feeling deeply disappointed—she dragged her father back slightly—to ask him——

'Ah, my good Antoine—and Morton, too—L'Esperance—and MacKim. Ha, ha—good old MacKim—and how's the ferry?—is it runnin' it to death you are?—and Fonnerty himself, bejabers.'

Her father was bubbling over old friends—and they were bubbling over him.

Sweeping off his hat he bowed low to a carriole on wheels in which were Mistress Currie, overflowing the main seat, Simone Laflamme, and Fanny Currie talking breezily.

Sir James Cameron and Mr. Johnson on sleek mounts essayed to approach her father but intervening papooses, children and grown ups, all gaping at the Governor barred his way.

'I would have speech with you before I go, sir—later,' he lifted his voice in lordly request to the Major, who, delighted, saluted in stern military fashion. 'Very well, sir. Very well, whenever you say.'

Mr. Cecil Johnson, succeeded rather better than the Governor in reaching an objective, was all at once at Margaret's ear. 'Interesting *vivarium,* is it not, Miss Moore?'

Startled, Margaret turned to him. She did not know what he meant.

'I have not thought of it, sir,' she replied, nervously—and pushed her father lightly on.

'And who may that be?' he asked in amazement.

'Mr. Johnson, papa—he came to see us with——'

'Ah!' another recognition. 'I leave you a moment, Maggie!' He had caught sight of someone and sped away.

Margaret watched him. Yes, he was going straight—He was shaking hands with the Acting Trader——! Who was delighted to see him—and papa to see him!

They were well acquainted!

Before she could get her breath, papa was back with Koominah Koush, introducing him, delightedly. 'Roger MacLachlin, Margaret, my dear—Roger MacLachlin, no less—my daughter, sir—my daughter.'

Mr. MacLachlin bowed deeply. 'I am happy indeed to meet Miss Moore—to whom I have been able to have been of some slight service, sir——' he turned to her

father, who was, however, by that time, even, talking to someone else who had accosted him.

'My brother and I appreciated your helping us on both occasions, greatly,' Margaret said stiffly.

'It was very little, Miss Moore—I trust that in the future—in the near future——' Koominah Koush all at once floundered—lost in the steady, blue eyes bearing out on him—recovering only when the eyes suddenly fell—'You frequently walk to the Fort, Miss Moore?'

'Rarely,' Margaret murmured without looking up.

'Oh, indeed,' he coughed slightly.

'Except—for purposes of air. We are at some distance.' She glanced up, aside, and her tone was negligent, even cold.

'You dwell in a beautiful grove. I can understand that you would not wish to leave so beautiful a spot.'

'It is beautiful.'

'Not more so than its indwelling spirit.'

'Indwelling spirit?'

'Than you.'

'You are bold, sir,' she stated, delivering a direct and well chilled glance.

'I shall be bolder——'

'Another friend—another friend, Maggie,' her father interrupted, wrenching apart abruptly two pairs of eyes locked together, introducing someone else.

Her father was trying to make headway, but he was so popular. People crowded about him to speak to him and no one person could remain near the father and daughter for long. There were still many more to be greeted, all the 'Macs' from down the Red and all the

other settlers who this fine morning had wandered to this current point.

At last he was away from all and out on the road with his clinging daughter. They were away from people at last, from everyone; in among the wild roses, where bees buzzed around making soft furry sounds that seemed to be doing their best to cover over a small but jagged hurt directed towards Margaret's heart—abruptly, as soon as she had left Koominah Koush. Had she said the right thing? What had she said? Would he think——? Had she dispensed too great a chill? The long, low murmur of the wind, trying to soothe the hurt added to it—and for one moment at least, from the bright blue sky itself, the ache she had had before, poured down on her—and her hand in her father's arm, her father, who had returned!

He had lighted his pipe and in between puffs was asking her questions. Was her mother in health? Was Tim as wild a little scallawag as ever? How were the other two—brats?

She answered all excitedly, with a tremor in her voice, her sensitive, flower-like face upturned in so pure, so soft a gaze. Tim was as cunning as ever and the other boys too. Mamma was well, though often fatigued.

'Um?' smoking.

'Harry, papa, troubles her.'

'Harry?'

'Harry who works for us, papa.'

'Yes, yes, of course.'

'Might we be able, papa, to secure someone else to help Don?'

'I'll see. I'll see.'

'It is difficult with Harry at times. He annoys mamma a great deal.'

Major Moore puffed away, looking down at his child, with reverence—so old-fashioned—so beautiful—so good. Not a child any longer, perhaps. Gad—she must be—how old?

'It is difficult with Harry at times. He annoys mamma a great deal,' Margaret repeated.

Major Moore took his pipe out of his mouth. 'You —you,' his voice was strained, 'would like Harry away, too?'

'Yes, papa.'

'Why?'

'Oh, well, you see—you see, papa——' She began briskly but faltered.

Her father stood still. 'Why—why,' he stuttered —'It's not that he'll be botherin' a little girl like you?'

'Oh, no, he doesn't bother me, papa,' she scoffed. 'Oh, papa, we were looking for you everywhere a long time—and—and,' out of breath, 'a woman in a cart threw a bed out at Don and he fell down and—and— Roger MacLachlin told us where you were.'

She was talking fast, giving him a complete account of their efforts to find him—other things—when three boys lying in ambush sprang out from a thicket.

'Ho, ho—toity-hoity! What have we here—what have we here. So this is Teddy? So this is the baby?' taking hold of him.

'I'm not a baby, papa—I'm not a baby—and I'm not

Teddy—I'm Tim,' he screamed throwing his arms around his father's neck.

'Whoa—whoa, there,' to Pat and Rob, delivering a terrible onslaught on his person—then clinging like burrs to the parental stem.

He put Tim down and extracted Pat and Rob with difficulty.

Tim, Rob and Pat then all raced backwards, talking at once.

'Don had a ride first—It's my turn—It's my turn—we have little chicks—and cunning little pigs with curly tails—Mistress Denny's parrot has a beak like a spoon turned upside down——'

They arrived at the spot where their mother was waiting.

She stumbled back with them, stumbled though so well supported by their father—and saying nothing. She was weeping.

She wished, Margaret, that she had not given her father *that* impression. Truly Harry did not bother *her*. He could not harm her. And it was absurd after all for mamma to allow his presence to disturb her. Once it had occurred to Margaret that he, alone, was the cause of her mother's discontent. That was wrong. Mamma was unhappy in papa's absence. Now that he was home all would be different, and he would, in view of her mother's dislike for Harry, dispense with his services—when he understood.

All these minor matters, all other uneasiness could not intrude now, for that ache, that sharp ache had moved aside—mercifully had moved aside.

As they approached the house Harry came jumping and leaping like a quadruped, overjoyed to meet the returning parent.

Not since that night over two weeks ago had Margaret been near enough to Harry to see his features. Now she was quite close to him, and noticing his eyes as never before, was greatly startled.

Chapter XI

Soon the family sat down to a repast planned weeks before, and after Major Moore had pronounced a long grace in a shattering voice, were royally fed. Roast beef, a rarity—Angus Currie had killed an animal—rich gravy, turnips, potatoes, fresh onions, fresh bread, fresh butter, plum duff and rum sauce and foaming beer.

Children do not speak except when spoken to. 'Fine pudding, eh?' the father whispered very confidentially into the small ear beside him, that of Timothy, on the last lap of the sauce.

'Yeth, sir.' Not tongue-tied but drawing a pudgy hand across a luscious mouth produced an impolite sibilance. Robert, too, began to suckle a plummy finger with ill-bred sumptuousness.

'For shame,' their mother said.

Major Moore circled the last raisin with his spoon, and when it was gone pushed away from the table, for better breathing.

Silent, suppressed, torn with suspense, Timothy, finally stretching up, breathed huskily in his father's face, 'Have you presents, papa?'

The Major cracked the table with his fist. The dishes shook and rattled. 'Gad—thim presents, in the pack—the blackguard,' he roared, his face violently red.

'Is it Angus Currie?' his wife enquired.

'It is that. If I'd thought he'd take hold of the pack at all—at all.'

'He's a well-meaning man, Robert.'

'Well-manin' be—a villain's job—me just off my horse.'

'You've no need to trouble yourself. He'll not play any sharp tricks on you. And will you not listen to the news? Sir James gave us the pleasure of his company, yesterday.'

'Yes, yes,' subsiding slightly. 'I must be seein' him.'

'He wished to see you.'

'So he sayed—so he sayed.'

'Is it that you saw him?'

'Sure, sure, he came to meet me—he came to meet me—that's phwat he's here for——' the Major guffawed. 'Maggie, me dear, who was that man who spoke to you?'

'Mr. Johnson, papa.'

'He accompanied Sir James,' her mother explained shortly.

'I don't like the cut of his jib, sir,' Don put in acidly.

'And I'm of the same way of thinkin',' his mother said.

'Well, well——' Major Moore said vaguely. 'Who is he?' Her mother explained curtly. Her father seemed interested, because of Mr. Johnson coming from the same part of Ireland, and insisted on asking questions, which her mother appeared not to like.

There seemed to be some stress arising with regard to Mr. Johnson. Did her mother think of him as a suitor? That flashed into Margaret's mind all at once; to ward off which and the stress, she quickly introduced

a huge barrier, this time the mountains. 'Did you see the mountains, papa?'

'I did that and a sight they are—I'll never forget them, never. It was in the dewy morn when I first glimpsed their snowy peaks, piercin' the clouds—risin' in the distance, silent, massive—rachin' to the very hivvins—the very hivvins. Ah—a grand sight that—never will I forget it——

'But let me tell you—let me tell you,' in a loud whisper, secretive, yet addressed to all, taking his pipe out of his mouth, 'that very morn, that very morn,' bursting into his great laugh, 'I came to a river bank—to a camp of Indians waitin' long time there for a clergyman to christen their brats—and begad—begad when they saw me comin', gad—if they did not think I was the prayin' man. They all rin up to me and shouted "prayin' man—prayin' man"—and when I got their manin'—gad, I didn't like to disappoint thim, after thim waitin' so long, so I christened their brats, everyone of thim. Christened thim good, put good measure of water on their little faces. And thim little ones, that good, everyone of thim crowin' at me—bedad——'

'Was that meet and proper?' his wife enquired.

'Sure, sure—I gave thim good measure of sarvice—part of the burial sarvice—parts of the holy bonds of matrimony—as well as a good piece of the baptismal sarvice—all I could remember—some Latin, too, egad—and—and,' laughing loudly, gasping for breath—'if you'd seed all thim little papooses crowin' at me——'

Slapping his thigh he threw back his head and laughed—and laughed; Margaret, thinking all the while

more of the peculiar idea of Mr. Johnson as a suitor (which had just occurred to her from her mother's manner and which explained her attitude in part towards that gentleman last night) than of the subject of the mountains, which she had set in motion, a much more pleasant subject, now concluded. Her father had described the mountains, ably, and had related as well how he had witnessed the baptism of some Indian infants, all of whom had crowed at him, and he was now laughing at the memory of those cunning little dark babies crowing, she realized at last.

From this tale he plunged into another, of an adventure which barely missed a tragic ending.

'We were goin' along—gad I'll never forgit it—one night—me and Adam—when we saw a prairie fire comin' to meet us. If we could turn south and rach Fort Grace before the flames were on us—that was the question—I spurred and spared not—we were going, like the wind—in the dark—when all 'tonct we were down in a black morass—Adam plungin' and rarin'—and goin' deeper and deeper—and me on the back of him, goin' down—and down—thin, begad—I thought of the long shaganappi rope in me bag—I ripped it out and tied it to Adam's bridle—and took a long lape—and there was I on the firm ground.

'Thin I tried to pull Adam out—tried and tried—pulled and pulled—but he got stuck so fast in the quakin' bog, he was pullin' me in—faster nor I was pullin' him out—and all the while the fire was gettin' closer—and closer—lightin' up and crackin'—and the roar of it—the blast of the flames—and thin all 'tonct I was back in

the mud beside Adam and up to me ears in ooze—I said my prayers—I felt, myself—sinkin'—sinkin'—thin I knew nothin' at all—at all—until all 'tonct I felt myself being dragged—and dragged—and after a while—bedad if I wasn't out on the firm airth, safe and sound, gaspin' and blowin' the dirt off—and Adam rollin' on the ground a piece off—still pullin' me—until I shouted to him.'

Putting his pipe back into his mouth encircled by smoke and speechless boys the narrator of this experience was silent—until with a twisted smile he bit out of his pipe, 'That's the time I was near drowned and roasted.'

'How did Adam get out, sir?' Donovan asked.

'Sure, he swam out.'

'He swam out? Swam the mud?'

'That's what I said. Did you not hear me?'

He told of other hair-breadth escapes. Travelling for days through the muffling grass, making fires, preparing meals, seeing no man, red or white. So fatigued at night, spreading his blankets, sleeping deeply. Once he awoke to hear a herd of buffalo, a million or more he said, thundering by, not far away. He might easily have been trampled to death.

How perilous his course throughout! Margaret was sure of it, although she had not heard all he had said. Night after night out on the plains establishing his lonely bivouac. All he had endured for his brother's sake. Whom he had not found after all.

How distressing for him! She had wanted to see the uncle (the parenthetical uncle) and the boys would have been so pleased. She had been on the point of making an

enquiry of her father, but the opportunity had slipped. Doubtless he would tell mamma everything.

But he had had experiences so appalling—yet he saw a gay side to every danger; and again and again he sent them into gales of laughter. Gales of laughter. She felt them all wreathed in gales of laughter—except herself; often outside the wreaths and, even while in them, being carried back and forth on the ebb and flow of a much greater emotion.

Chapter XII

And laughter drifted over from across the water, rippling, sunny as the water. Many Bassons and Collettes, men, women and children, were home again. Open doors were filled with chattering grown ups, the great grandparents swallowed up among the new arrivals; men in corduroy breeches with checked shirts, women and girls in short skirts, scantily covered children playing on the banks, papooses adjusted against the trunks of trees; dogs, and a litter of puppies rolling on the grass.

What laughter, rippling, sunny as the water, the laughter of a people who lived in a golden age in a golden land, a land of plenty, who had gone forth on an adventure, had met the buffalo, and now had enough and to spare to buy fine velvet, even enough to buy sparkling liquors to quench a long prairie drought.

Many days they had lived under the great and good skies, until the sun grew too hot. It was more pleasant now under the cool trees by the Assiniboine, the slyly gliding, green Assiniboine. It was pleasant, too, to be with the good *grandmère* and the good *grandpère* once more—and once more within sound of the bells of St. Boniface. So happy a time in the neighbourhood.

In the evening Major Moore had mounted Adam, hero of many a tale—one had an opportunity to see what a noble beast he was, arched neck, flowing mane,

fine flanks—and had gone forth to interview Angus Currie.

He was away a long time. The boys, whom even the hope for presents could not keep awake, were in bed. Margaret and her mother alone had not retired.

'I wish he is not with his friends. Do you go out now,' her mother urged Margaret finally. 'See if there be a sight of him.'

Margaret went out into the moonlight, into the pit which was the world, coldly, startlingly lighted. She looked up. The moon, nearly full at the top of the sky, dimmed by its own brilliance, the thick-sown stars. She looked down again and all around. The cart-track, clumps of poplar, the house, were as clear to her vision as in noonday. Blades of grass at her feet were quite defined, drifts of pollen in the air, and, on the water, insects flicking. But below the trees, below the masses of foliage it was very dark.

She gazed along the cart-track but could see no dashing horseman, could hear no sound of hoofs in the distance. If she could have heard? The ground so soft, and the whole riverside vibrating with the music of violins. Numerous merrymakers had gathered at the Collettes, and the sound of swift-moving feet, of rousing harmonies, filled the night.

Margaret, first struck to stillness, all at once stepped into the rhythm of the frolicking feet across, the rhythm of the Red River jig, her full-skirted gown swaying, her golden hair flying, in soulful abandon, in a sort of rapture, music throbbing through her. Never before had she felt so inspired. She thrust up one arm and the loose

sleeve dropping, exposed it to the air, slim, white and gleaming as a new sword. Lifting the other arm, it too, unsheathed, gleamed forth, slim, white and sword-like. On and on, the full skirt swaying, the golden hair flying in soulful abandon until the end of the Red River jig. And still on—in the breathing spell across the water—on —and on—circling about now with a stamping tread in unison with the drumming, becoming audible, from an encampment of Indians on the plains, a distant drumming yet steady, persistent, with a rat-a-tatting, sometimes a gay clatter of primitive instruments in full force, and over all the weird minor droning of wild voices.

It was the Giving-Away-Dance, Margaret told herself. Madeleine had called her attention to it on a previous occasion. It had the lightness and carelessness of that simple game of giving away something with a pretty ceremony. At any rate to those very simple measures Margaret continued to walk with gladness, with variations of her own, calling into play the hair of gold, the flashing arms, the waving skirt—until in among the trees in front of her she saw suddenly a pair of eyes, eyes only, burning on her.

Harry! Harry again.

She swung around, sped towards the house, in turning saw her father on his horse, bounding forward, silhouetted in the ghostly moonlight.

Inside she toppled on the floor, out of breath.

Alarmed her mother came to her, helped her rise.

'What is it?'

It was several seconds before Margaret could speak.

'What is it?'

'Nothing—nothing—Papa is coming.'

'I am glad of that—but,' pained, 'is it running you've been?'

'I—I—hurried——'

With his usual acclaim and vitality Major Moore plunged in. 'Have you had a visitor?'

'A visitor? No——'

'I saw someone going off in a canoe—downstream.' He discharged a huge bundle on the floor. 'See what I fetched ye. The blackguard found there was more in the package than anything due him. It was Roger MacLachlin gave him the true value of it. No sharp tricks about him. Now, see what we have.'

Undoing the bundle from which it appeared little or nothing had been extracted he brought forth the inmost roll. The gifts. A pair of long seal gauntlets each for Margaret and her mother. A mink cap each for the boys. All of softest, silkiest furs.

'Exceeding handsome,' Elizabeth Moore pronounced each article, examining the workmanship, the fur. 'Exceeding handsome. We shall be fine, everyone.'

Major Moore put one of the small caps on his wife's head, tied it down as well as he could under her chin and kissed her. Put another on Margaret, tied it similarly and kissed her. Pulling her to his knee he put one arm around her and another around Margaret. 'So our little pussy is growing up, eh?'

His wife rose, with difficulty, told him he was foolish, and her lips quivering, stroked the seal of a gauntlet.

Major Moore showed them all the other skins.

'Sure I'll make a good spec on them.'

'Why not buy Donovan a horse?' her mother spoke up quickly.

'I'd like fine to help him to his desire, but——' He was bringing forth something else. 'A moose's snout presarved.'

'And what will you be doing with that?'

'Ate it, begorra.'

'You're welcome to ut.'

'Sure it has a foine taste.'

'I want none of ut.'

'All the better for the loikes of me, says I.'

'Oh, papa, is it—oh, is it alive?'

'No, no—and now Maggie, me dear, put it by—for me next male.'

'And how did you come by it. Will you tell me that?'

'Yes, yes—but I was goin' to tell you—I met the man, Johnson, this evening. Comes from Ireland,' he declared with delight.

'If he does?'

'From your own country, woman?'

'So he sayed.'

'From Mallyhall—close by me old home—do you mind that?'

'I mind that.'

'Well, well, so you don't care—and did not Scott, the great poet himself say "Breathes there a man with soul so dead—who niver to himself has sayed——" '

'But how did you come by the moose's snout—tell me that?'

He began a full account of a moose hunt. A thrilling story Margaret felt it to be. The distant prairie which in

her own thoughts had so many phases became in her father's tale a vast and splendid playground, the playground of Indians and *bois brûlés*—and her father, lord and master of that great playground—master of every adventure, telling of every change of fortune with zest, with whimsical turns, mentioning hardships and extreme cold incidentally. Telling at last, however, on this one occasion after the hunt was over, how greatly he had been exhausted, how he had been brought by Indians to a lodge where a young squaw 'who presented a truly beautiful appearance' gave him a cup of buffalo blood to drink, which had strengthened him much.

Often during this account Margaret's lips were half parted. Often she drew deep breaths of a dutiful wonder. All at once she began to listen intently, her father addressing her, too.

'Was I tellin' you, Maggie, about the mountains? I was going to the Hudson Bay establishment at Fort —— the home of Roger MacLachlin, him I introjuiced you to to-day, you mind? A fine spot that, situate on a lake of livin' watter with woods beside—and there it was I first caught sight of the mountains. Niver shall I fergit thim mountains, Maggie, rachin' to the sky. It was in the dewy morn when I first saw thim snowy pakes—risin' in the distance, silent, massive—it's a caution how silent thim pakes is—rachin' to the very hivvins—the very hivvins.'

Shutting his eyes then, with one hand aloft, he chanted in the voice he used in describing scenes of nature, 'Always in recollectin' that sublime scene my eyes shall be filled wid tares—and my soul with awe.

Niver shall I fergit them. To my dyin' day that pitcher will remain wid me. Yea, though thousands of miles siparate me from that gran' view the memory of ut will niver fade—niver fade, sor, no niver. As I first saw thim snowy pakes piercin' the sky, risin' in the distance, silent, massive—rachin' to the——'

'You best go to your rest,' her mother said quietly to Margaret, interrupting papa.

Surprised for an instant, Margaret went to her room —but not to rest. She lay awake a long time living over again all the happenings of the day. Going to meet her father. The difficulty of finding him. Koominah Koush coming to the rescue. What he said, his words, his tone of voice, his manner. 'Koominah Koush'. Did one imagine that when he removed his hat, the sun shining on his raven hair lent it rainbow tints?

His hair was dark. However—the darker, the better.

What was the difference, she began to wonder, between those of Indian blood and themselves, in essence? She tried to answer this question as an outsider, tried to remember qualities doubtless which she had taken for granted. Simone Laflamme was beautiful in a dark way. Fanny Currie had blue eyes. With the exception of Colin, all of the other sisters and brothers were good-looking. Roger MacLachlin was good-looking.

She wondered a trifle, too, about Harry, of whose eyes she had had so splendid a view to-night when she had seen him peering through the trees, wondered about his mother, Bella, the Bassons, the Collettes, the MacElherans—and others—but arrived at no conclusion.

Music crossing the water, flowed in on her—and

through her. There was no sleep in her. Her spirit once more on wings, she rose and went to the window. The moon was so bright. All was illuminated as before except the lower parts of the trees, as before. She observed them closely. Not a leaf was moving. There were no eyes among them.

She put an ear to the sill and, when the violins all stopped once, listened straining every nerve, but heard nothing.

It had been a curious feeling she had had on seeing those eyes—and she could not forget them.

She would speak to her father again about Harry—on mamma's account. She would make that clear. Papa might forget.

Back under the covers, she reviewed all the events of the day again, tossing and tossing, lying on one side thinking of one thing, discarding that by turning to the other. Finally by force of much tossing she would winnow away all irrelevant considerations, Mr. Johnson's mysterious salutation *vivarium?* What did that mean? Mr. Johnson as a suitor? An absurd idea of her mother's, if she had it in truth? Colin among the crowd to-day, not however sidling up as usual, her father being so overwrought concerning the presents, the uncle not coming after all, Harry appearing among the trees—his eyes—so—but that was the merest coincidence. All of those considerations might mar, if harboured, the few perfect moments.

So tossing and tossing she seemed to winnow away by her body itself, as with a light flail, everything vexatious, finally would succeed in separating all chaff from the

good grains, and would lie still a long time then in rigid happiness, as if impaled by the result, the harvest, all the wonderful thoughts and feelings surrounding those few perfect grains.

Her father and mother talked long in low tones. The music and the dancing across the river grew more and more hilarious. Now and again would be a lull, a breath-taking lull, and in that weary silence Margaret would hear the voices of her parents droning out in the other room. Low and subdued with an occasional harsh note rasped out.

Papa explaining doubtless how in his most unselfish, most commendable search he had encountered many difficulties—yet had not found his brother.

Then it would be necessary for him to go away again, as always.

With due solemnity she regarded this axiomatic fact, momentarily.

Chapter XIII

ANOTHER night Margaret saw Harry among the trees and again his eyes haunted her.

On rising the next morning when it seemed the summer heat had reached its zenith, Margaret resolved to remind her father of his promise that Harry should be dismissed on his next fault. But as she dressed she heard papa laughing loudly outside. Laughing and laughing.

Harry had been found asleep in the clay oven! He had spent the night there!

'Sure we might have roasted you and had you for dinner, Harry.'

Papa was greatly amused. At breakfast the boys and he made merry over it—and mamma did not appear displeased.

At the table, too, her father announced that he was that morning to see Governor Cameron by appointment, and as soon as he had completed his meal he set out. He would not return, he said, until the afternoon.

By afternoon there was not a breath of air. Sitting under the trees, Margaret fanned her face with her hands but produced little coolness, little current. It was so calm. Leaves of poplars usually quivering were motionless as in a vacuum. Below, the river, low in its bed, crawled, a glassy amber.

On the other bank no one was in sight. Soon after their return from the summer hunt their neighbours

commenced preparations for the fall hunt, but rested frequently. Earlier in the day women had been scraping and refining skins stretched out on the ground. Now was no sign of man, woman or child. All were reposing out of view. A fire smouldering in the ground over which skins were supported, smoked in a suffocating way. This alone indicated the existence of human beings across the river.

Papa had gone again, and she had lost her opportunity for a time. He would return later. He alone. Nothing of consequence would happen in the meantime, nothing of consequence indeed ever did happen. No person of any importance had visited them since Sir James Cameron and Mr. Johnson. Papa had been home a month now and nothing since his return worth recording had happened. Doubtless nothing would happen. They would continue to live quietly until papa went away again, for a year or more, until the usual excitement of his setting forth. It was a tranquil life and Margaret liked a tranquil life. *'J'aime la vie tranquille—J'aime la vie tranquille,'* she repeated to herself in a restless fashion. *'J'aime la vie tranquille,'* she insisted, speaking into the air, swooning about her, mute except for the waxing sound of butterflies in flight; except for the beating of the sun's hard rays. One seemed to hear that, the beating of heat itself, so still was everything else.

What greater tranquillity could one wish? Family life progressing quietly. Her father at home, his brother for the present not being sought, her father enjoying a well-earned rest from strenuous searching. The days passing without quarrels. Except on one occasion per-

haps? In her room she had heard indistinctly her parents discussing Colin Currie. Her mother did favour him as a suitor, that was clear, but what were her points in his favour was not clear. Neither her father's points against him. Nothing of these details, though they both felt strongly and the discussion had been so warm and had had in parts the resonance of a genuine quarrel. But no words came to her in their entirety, until the last, when her father, evidently pooh-poohing the whole idea of applicants for her hand at present, had shouted that she was much too young. All nonsense. Plenty of time. Plenty of time.

That was satisfactory enough as far as Colin Currie was concerned, whom indeed papa had once gone so far as to call 'that lout'. The question would lie dormant until it died, she hoped. Mamma surely would not attempt to bring him forward again. Colin Currie himself was not in evidence and this idea of her mother's, thoroughly crushed by papa, would not ever be introduced again. Margaret felt secure on that score.

Since then all had been very quiet at home. There had been no further disagreements, no bickerings. It was marvellous and one should be thankful, a lover of the tranquil life especially. Greater tranquillity might be secured, of course, if Harry were eliminated as well, as assistant to Donovan. She herself still felt some uneasiness on his account—an infection doubtless from her mother, carried over from that night when they had found Harry in the house for the first time, when her mother had been so upset, as if it were something criminal. Seeing him in among the trees twice at night

since, she had caught the uneasiness again. That was all.

But might not mamma after all continue to regard Harry's irregularities, as diverting merely, as she had this morning appeared to regard his sleeping in the oven all night—as had her father and brother?

Swinging over to this angle from which she and all the family might regard Harry as an amusing buffoon, her concern vanished for the time, and once more she saw that life was tranquil indeed, and loving it, had no fault to find with it. *'J'aime la vie tranquille—J'aime la vie tranquille,'* she repeated without rest, fanning herself with her hand again. It was so hot. One was forced to notice the heat, if not complain of it. One could not imagine that it ever would become so warm.—Mamma might in time cease to dislike Harry to a degree and be won over to papa's habitual amused tolerance. At any rate the determination to speak to him on the matter, when he returned, was oozing away—in the heat.

Harry came painfully to one's notice at times, yet he was truly useful. Down on the river bank now he was cleaning out the root house, removing the malodorous remains of the winter's store of vegetables, bringing them up and piling them in a corner in the garden, straining every nerve.

He was helpful—and he would go through fire and water to win her father's good opinion. Even when papa was not at hand, Harry bestirred himself greatly with papa in mind. He alone was energetic to-day. Patrick and Robert were in the garden operating clap-

pers to drive away the blackbirds from the peas, feebly, with the feebleness of the aged.

What would Don do without Harry?

Don was viewing his first plot of grain, on the other side of the house. The whole field lying immersed in the sunlight was well-headed and tipped with gold.

But he was anxious about something. Even from here, Margaret could see that, in the set of his figure.

She understood. He was looking from the silky, buoyant grain to a line of brooding clouds in the West, from which issued even at that moment a low rumbling. There was going to be a storm.

No one would come to see them to-day, either, if there was a storm. Even her father might not return to-night. Nothing would happen. They had had no visitors since Sir James and Mr. Johnson and she had talked to no one outside her own family since she had spoken briefly to Roger MacLachlin, the day of her father's homecoming. 'I shall be bolder,' he had said—his last words—and she had seen and heard nothing more of him. Nothing whatever.

No one would come to-day. There would be a storm soon. The darkness in the West was increasing. The memory of great moments does not help one greatly when after weeks they have not been repeated, when they might have been repeated or improved. And this in her case, 'the Lily of Fort Garry', who had reached the age of the lily's greatest importance—everything pointed to that, in spite of her father's airy dismissal of possible suitors for the present—was a lack, approaching tragedy, which, because of lack being its chief in-

gredient, presented no points by which it would be apprehended and examined.

There appeared to be no reason whatever for this lack, yet there it was. A lack. However, she loved the tranquil life. *'J'aime la vie tranquille,'* she told herself once more, fanning herself again with her hands, desperately. It was so warm. Not that one would complain, but one was forced to notice. Out beyond Don the prairie sea lay in a vast torpor.

Brown, hardy Timothy, had gone out there a few moments ago, talking to himself. 'He pulled and he pulled—but he was stuck so fast in the quakin' bog he was pullin' me in faster nor I was pullin' him out—and all the while the fire gettin' closer and closer—he pulled and he pulled—but he was stuck so fast——'

Presently he came back, a flame-coloured flower in his hand. At Margaret's feet he dug a hole with his fingers and planted there this orange lily. Patting and patting the earth around it he crooned, 'Grow my little flower, grow—Grow my little flower, grow,' a tuneless sing-song falling to a murmur. Then after having patted it, and after having breathed on it the breath of life, he all at once pulled it up.

Except for a few particles of earth at the base of the stem, which he examined intently, there was no change.

'It didn't grow.' He was sad. 'Why didn't it grow, Maggie?'

Maggie did not answer. She was not noticing. Was this the old ache?

'Why didn't it grow, Maggie?'

Still no answer, her eyes staring. Some blankness, indeed, had descended on her.

He flicked the love lily in her face, impatiently. 'Why did it not grow?'

'Why—oh, Tim,' she answered at last, with a sigh, 'it has no root.'

Timothy gazed at the flower with reproach a second, then had another inspiration.

The severed bloom might not sprout at Margaret's feet, but might be put to another good use (lacking the power of reproduction). Squirming around he thrust the flower under her chin. 'Do you like butter, Maggie? Do you like butter?'

The golden reflection on her white skin was proof. 'You do so. You do so,' he shouted in delight.

Wiping a bedewed brow and a flushed face with her apron, their mother drifted out of the house. Tim ran to her and tried by making little leaps to hold the lily under her chin. 'Do you like butter, mamma? Do you like butter?'

She caught Tim's hand and its enclosure in her own. 'No, child.' She, too, was preoccupied. 'It is going to rain, I fear,' she said, looking along the cart-track.

A black cloud passed over, darkening the river. A current of air set the leaves fluttering, passed on, flattened the grass, then was gone and it was oppressively calm again.

Timothy espied someone at the rear, dismounting and rushed in that direction.

Margaret stood up, smoothed her gown, her hair, all

in one minute, peered around the house to see who it was, wisps of joy in her eyes.

'Here you,' the Major shouted to Harry.

Oh, it was her father! She sat down again.

Gurgling pleasure, Harry ran and took his master's horse.

Timothy, his hand in his father's, hopped along, happily, trying to match the Major's stride, a rolling cavalier stride, legs slightly bowed from being much on horseback.

'I've been talking to Sir James above an hour,' he burst out, coming to the front. 'Gad, I'm all in a swelter. This heat will breed something. Mark my words.—What he wished to see me about? Wanted to give me a place at the Fort. Made me a good offer, I am bound to say.

'But of course I told him—with deep regret—I didn't like much to say it, I could not do so. No, I sayed, I could not do so.'

He stood looking into his wife's eyes, the picture of forlorn inevitability and she looked into his, until suddenly without a word she turned and went into the house.

The Major followed her blankly.

'I'll go see if papa likes butter.' Gleefully Timothy darted in the direction. The next moment he darted out again, his face white and frightened.

A shriek, a sob, leapt out of the house.

Margaret sat up, stiffened, strained.

A volley of words issued with fearful distinctness, sharp and piercing.

'Stay with his family. No, of course not. Of course not. Don and me working like slaves. Me, scrubbing, washing, digging and you, you, the fine gentleman, trying to act the fine gentleman—never done a stroke of work. Never, never. If it wasn't for the neighbours we might be starved, many's the time—many's the time. And sure what cares he?—him, the fine gentleman—pretendin' to be—and us livin' on charity. Everyone pitying us—pitying us—I tell you Major Robert Moore,' her voice rose to its highest, shrillest pinnacle, 'it's more than flesh and blood can stand.'

'Now, now Elizabeth. That's not right. That's not right. You know better.'

'What do I know better?' she screamed. 'I know better, do I? I know you are offered so good a chance as ever a man had. I know that. I know we could hold up our heads, again. And you would be here to help Don. Him working. The work of a man or more. And all the times we've had alone—the sicknesses. Don getting his foot cut so bad, chopping wood, and the doctor coming—and us not able to pay him for a long time and him refusing to take the money—refusing—pitying us.'

On and on the long angry wail poured out of the door, covering everything, potatoes frozen and rotted, oxen lost in a blizzard, everything. A long harrowing lament, full of recriminations—of sad memories; the death of two children between Donovan and Patrick at the time of an epidemic. Two small sisters put in one rough box and buried together. All in his absence. All that and more she poured forth until stopped by a desperate flood of weeping.

After pacing up and down the room, Margaret saw her father at the door and heard him protesting. 'On me soul, woman—I cannot see—for the loife of me,' turning back. 'You wrong me—you wrong me. If it is right and proper for me to seek my brother, it is right and proper.'

'Let him go. For God's sake, let him go. It's not worth it,' she shrieked. 'And when you are away, people telling tales about you.'

'Telling tales about me?' He swung around to her.

'Talking about you.'

'Talking about me?' he thundered. 'What do you mane?'

'I mean what I say.'

'What do I care what they say,' he shouted. 'And you've no need to pay any attention—if that's phwat's worryin' you—if they can't kape their tongues off me——' he stopped to breathe his rage. 'Gad, I thought they was my friends. We can lave here, thin, and go into Canada. I'll take yese all, by hivvin, I will. You've no need to stay here if they're vexin' you——'

'And what would keep us in Canada, tell me that?'

'My pension—and I could bespeak a post for Don in Montreal with the Weldons, them that knew my brother, Samuel.'

'You let Don be! You let Don be.' Her voice soared again. 'Don was born and bred here—and he's worked his ground well. Faugh! You and your fine promises. I know you. I know you. You can roar like a bull but what would you really do——? If you could help Don where he is?'

'God knows I'd like to. I'd like to do so.' He sat down in a heap at the door. 'But it's no use—it's no use. I know naught of farming. That was your thought—and—I must find my brother—if I look until I die. I have no other help.' Lifting up his head he gazed out into space.

Such unhappiness—more and more unhappiness. Blobs of tears trickled down Margaret's cheeks and the frightened Timothy drawing up to her whispered, 'What's the matter, Maggie? What's the matter, Maggie?'

She hardly heard her mother's voice, taking up its harrowing lament again, low and harrowing now; became conscious only when a jumble of words from her father, throttled, dense, shaped towards some uglier climax.

She grew alarmed and stood up. For the time she had forgotten everything but this. Would she go into the house and plead——

But it was too late. Her father came to the door, his face livid, twitching, his eyes staring in the blind way of a fish suddenly brought to light.

Stupefied she watched him steal along the front of the house where, his eyes still starting out of his head, he lighted on Harry. Watched him, with a run and a jump swoop down on the cringing boy, take him by the back of his neck, swing him around and around, then run him ahead, propelling him with blows and oaths.

'You dog, you glutton,' he roared.

Harry fell under the attack. The Major kicked him

up again, pushed him on to the river and shot him into the dug-out lying there.

'Begone—you skunk—as far as you can go—and never show your dirty face around here again or I'll tar and feather you,' he shouted, standing on the river-side, perspiration and vituperation pouring off him in the one stream; while Harry, far-off, paddled madly, against the current, against wild churning waters.

For the storm from on high, matching the family storm in much, had broken loose. The shallow river was lashing to rapids, with here and there a foam-tipped stack, trees were reeling, buildings blurring.

In a dizzy semi-darkness, Margaret, who noticed less the fury of the elements than ever before, was driven dumbly, with Patrick, Robert, Timothy and their father into the house, with the first awful crash of thunder and just before the first deluge of rain.

'Where's Donovan?' Their mother's voice pierced through to the clouds, pouring down their torrents.

'He's out in the stable,' Patrick screeched above the wind.

Their father turned and went out into the wild battering of the wind, hurling defiance at the house, filling the air, shutting off a view of everything.

After he had gone they closed the door, and it was black as night in the house, except for flashes of lightning; and silent as death except when thunder roared, blasting the world.

Chapter XIV

At last—it seemed hours—the inkiness of the room, a misty, diabolical shape, began to withdraw through the window, the thunder ceased to growl and when they opened the door a new air played over their faces, a cool, clear air, and their eyes met chill gleams on dripping trees, on wet grass; above, dark clouds parting with frost-like edges, the sun debouching.

Angus Currie came all the way from his home to see what damage had been done Donovan's wheat. After a careful survey he gave his opinion. Less than a third of the plot was seriously affected. And that might be reclaimed with the sickle.

'A miracle it was,' he declared. 'A sign of grace as things befell.' Other plots—more directly in the path of the storm—had been completely ruined. Chimneys had blown down. Windows were broken. The roof of Brown's house had been lifted and carried across the river.

The pillar of agriculture and of progress generally thudded into the house in his big beef boots, solid symbols of progress themselves, to make his report.

Margaret listened dully, hardly realizing that they had narrowly escaped a great material loss, hardly realizing that Don and her father, who had spent the whole period of the storm in a leaking stable, were drenched to the skin.

It was necessary to have a fire in any case, it was so cold.

They were all chilled, shrunken and unhappy, and after a silent supper sat in the face of a fine blaze, still in a strained manner; which their father made several efforts to relieve. First with bits of paper on two pairs of fingers he played for Timothy's amusement. 'Fly away Jack, fly away Jim. Come back Jack. Come back Jim.'

But he was not whole-hearted, his voice was grey at times, and at last he carelessly revealed how both Jack and Jim could return, a mystery which had intrigued Tim ever since his father had first played the game for him—until now.

That effort fell flat, then in the distressing quiet he began another sport, making rabbits on the wall. 'Look you. Look,' he called to Patrick and Robert, who looked and that was all. No shadows on the wall could shroud another shadow which they felt among them but could not name; nor the reality of a piece of juniper wood to which clung some precious natural chewing gum, and, for the possession of which, Patrick and Robert were contending with tense, subdued madness.

Next the Major began to hum, 'Believe me if all those endearing young charms,' a new song. A bar or two, that was all.

There had been times when he had sung throughout those Irish songs, sung so gloriously; times when, plunging into a boating or hunting song of the country which they all knew, they had all joined him; the younger boys clearly chirruping, Don quavering through hoarsely,

their mother adding a subtle contralto and Margaret her silvery notes.

There had been such evenings when they had been happy, when at the end of a melody, looking into the breaking coals, they had all melted into suitable sadness. But this was not such an evening, rather one such as Margaret had never before experienced, when her own mood which had been fomenting again to emptiness, was, with great pain, pressed back against her heart, by the solid weight of the family mood over all.

If that weight could be removed? The father was still trying, next by beginning a conversation with Don.

'The people in Ireland, lords and ladies all, grow potatoes, Don, and are satisfied with them. Now couldn't you grow more of them instead of bothering about the whate?'

'If, sir, we had more storage for potatoes. As it is the root house we have is not right. Last winter a quantity of vegetables were frozen in it.'

'In a settlement like this bordering on a great waste land, it's a mistake, a mistake, I say, all this farmin'——'

'There are others, sir.'

'Yes, yes, I know, that's phwat I say; it's a mistake. Isn't it true that thrice an experimental farm was begun here and thrice failed?'

'It was the management, sir, Mr. Currie tells me. Why, sir, if the whole prairie from here to the Rocky Mountains was ploughed and seeded with wheat this country could supply the world.'

'A monstrous presumption. A monstrous presumption. The prairie is barren. Barren, my boy. Haven't I been the plains across. A spot here and there maybe will grow whate, but that's all.

'And why whate. Why whate? Why supply the world. White bread is not for common people. Get that out of your noodle, boy. Let them ate potatoes—the pot-luck of the plains is good enough for me.

'And now, I say, if you grow all that whate, how will you carry it to the world, even if they want to ate it? By any manes of conveyance, by the Company's boats to York Factory or by ox-carts to the States, the cost is too great.'

'But, sir, by the time we have all our wheat ready,' the first 'brilliant optimist' of the West claimed, 'there will be steamboats. It'll not be long, sir, before you hear the whistle blowin', if you live long enough. It's not all puff, sir. It's not all puff. And soon afterwards there will be railroads.'

'God forbid:' the Major prayed fervently.

'Then, sir,' Don averred, his eyes big, 'some day not far from here there will be a city.'

'A city?' all chorused in consternation.

'Ha, ha—a city?—ha, ha. Some day there will be a city on the site of the North Pole. Ha—ha——'

'Some day,' Don repeated stubbornly, 'there will be a city not far from here, Mr. Currie says so.'

'Out beyant in the swamp, maybe—you're crazy, boy —you're crazy. Don't make a common wit of yerself.'

'You'll see, sir. You'll see—if you live long enough.'

'Tut, tut. Towering ideas! Towering ideas. Don't

make Angus Currie your pattern altogether my boy. To-day he sayed to me, this very day he sayed to me that he hoped in a few years to have a machine to cut the whate. What sort of machine, is it, will cut whate—will you tell me that? No, nor him naither.

'As for cities—cities, my boy, are for other parts of the world where they are intinded for. By gad, the Indians, thinks I, have the way that shoots the country. It's thim that has the best way. The Indian to my way of thinkin'—called a savage, whatever—is a highly developed human bain', highly developed in the wilderness and by the wilderness. Sure ages ago he took the world as he found it and everything was ready for him, wasn't it?—and he didn't try to alter the Divine Creation at all, at all, but tried to grow to mate it and in time he fits himself to it, the world as he finds it. That's the education of the Indian. It's a long course and it's not aisy, naither.

'The white man makes a great mistake. He sets out to change the airth, brings in his quare machines and all, loses his muscles and his interest and destroys the very manes of sustenance intinded for him, killing or forcing the natives to kill animals wholesale. That's what the white man is doing—and then when his natural food is destroyed he is obliged to replace it by something else with a great dale of trouble—a great dale of trouble——'

Reverting to his pipe the Major began to smoke furiously with a manner of finality.

Don said no more, allowing the finality, yet with a determined look, and angry, that his agricultural plans

were so little appreciated by his own father. But he could not cope with him in argument, and said nothing further; and silence descended again, silence to Margaret about so many things, about the one who came not, about the quarrel, about her mother's wild, desperate tactics, about Harry who had come once too often.

What had her mother told her father concerning Harry? What were people saying about her father, wrongly? What were they saying, she enquired of the silence?' She had never heard anything. What were they saying, she demanded again of the silence—and because of her insistence, perhaps, the silence at last answered with a speech of Mistress Denny's. Simple words yet with that peculiar intonation, Margaret heard them again. Harry could not serve the Major any better if he was his own son, Mistress Denny had said.

Could she have hinted——?

The long dreadful silence broken into for Margaret only by this speech from the past, continued; and for a long time she sat up stiffly enduring all the agony of purity contaminated by a thought, a wrong thought in Mistress Denny. From staring ahead of her she once dared to look at her mother and saw her staring ahead of her with annealed eyes and face ravished by weeping, saying nothing.

If something—something would dispel this worst silence and all it contained—altogether.

Once again her father took heart with an item of news.

'Roger MacLachlin came into my presence to-day. I knew his family and himself at the Fort—near the

mountains, as I was tellin' ye, Maggie. His faythe now intinds after years in the sarvice of the Company to retire to this place, but Roger, a forward youth, if ever there was, educated abroad, is wishful after his year or more here to go back—not that he told me—but I hear from others—and——'

'What concern are his affairs of ours?' her mother spoke up sharply, for the first time that evening, to her father.

After that her father said no more—and her mother said no more. The ice was not broken, merely cracked, sending up a dash of cold water, then clicking together again, with a final click; so that in Arctic desolation all went, shortly, to bed.

Chapter XV.

DIFFERENT labourers in turn were hired to do the work Harry had done and each after a brief trial was discharged. Major Moore himself undertook to assist, exerting himself greatly, but without enthusiasm.

Except in the annual community event of making hay. With others, whole families in many cases, the day fixed by proclamation at the end of July saw him and three sons early encamped on the hinterland, ready to cut the grass from the sloughs, now dry. As a result of a sociable and quite convivial outing in which Major Moore had a leading part, and finally as a result of the stacks the Moores assembled for themselves, the head of the house was in fine feather for a time; and Don declared that they would have hay to sell in the spring at twenty shillings a cartload.

But it was impossible to find anyone to take Harry's place. The Major again went through the colony for this purpose, but all available workers they had already had and dismissed. More than ever now their neighbours and kindred souls claimed to be preparing for the fall hunt, even if not noticeably so occupied at the time of consultation.

Finally papa relinquished the attempt and did what he could himself. Patrick and Robert were given a greater share of work, and Don toiled early and late. Even little Tim and Margaret had something to do. They helped

churn, they wiped plates, they shelled peas. One morning they were outside cleaning the table knives by thrusting them in and out of the ground when the rector called. He talked in the house with their mother for a time; then at the door, in leaving, of Harry. He was glad he said that the Major had at last proved that someone had a greater power of propulsion than Harry's mother, who, equally disliking him, had never succeeded in propelling him any farther than the Moores. Now it seemed Harry had been propelled a great distance, across the border in fact.

The rector departed, without seeing Margaret and Tim just around the corner of the house at their lowly task, and Margaret went on thinking among other things about Harry. Mamma had told papa all his faults and that was one good reason why he was no longer with them. A possible rumour suggested by Mistress Denny's remark was not among the rumours that her mother had repeated to her father. No other person than Mistress Denny by a look or a tone or work had ever implied such a calumny. Mistress Denny had given Margaret the thought by that look, that tone, so difficult to forget now that she saw this meaning in them. But that look, that tone was in no one else. Certainly not in the rector's manner to-day. There was nothing in his casual treatment of the subject of Harry to suggest that *he* had ever heard of such a thing. And as for Mistress Denny, was she not most inconsistent in her gossip? (Once she had said that one person was the father of Rose Collette—adopted by the Collettes—and again she declared most positively it was another person.

How could anyone depend on what she might say or intimate?)

There were enough other reasons why it was not desirable to retain Harry in their employ, without mamma's being driven in the height of her passion to taunt papa with such an interpretation of Mistress Denny's words, as had occurred to Margaret, with confusion and shame, with anger even.

But it was a relief to have Harry far away for many reasons, even if it seemed rather hard—everyone seemed against him—even if her father had dispensed with his services somewhat harshly. However though the sun had its black spots, as one understood, no one repudiated the sun in the least on that account. The sun was still the sun. Her father was still her father, full of inner warmth and fatherliness, lavish in fatherliness, violent towards Harry on that account, having in mind, as well as all her mother had told her, the suggestion she, Margaret herself, had carelessly given him the day he had returned, that Harry bothered her—desiring to protect her from the uneasiness she had revealed for a moment, mindful of his duties as a father, as the head of the house.

Her father was even more her father for what he had done, now that she came to think of it, even more the head of the house.

Although, alas, not receiving the homage due the head of the family at present from the others—impossible not to notice that—not receiving the homage due a man of great nobility of soul. Don, indeed, now would wax disputatious at any moment. Don, vainglorious to make one blush, would have his way about all farming

procedure, rudely rejecting altogether papa's manner of treating farming as the occupation of a gentleman.

And all the while papa set an example of lofty forbearance, and was all the while so plastic to mamma's wishes, engaging in so many unwonted tasks, papa who had always kept to paths of rectitude, mamma must acknowledge, whatever the rumours were to which she had referred, who was so grand and simple concerning the great trust. He must find his brother, he had no other help.

It was quite fortunate indeed that the Governor had left the colony the day after the storm, and that the offer of the position had left with him, for papa *might* have retracted his refusal of the offer, because of mamma, in his plastic mood, though that was wrong. Now there was no danger of that, and papa would go away shortly, as always. He tarried merely to be of assistance 'at the summit of agriculture' since mamma had so complained of his having left at this time last year. And he was doing all he could. But it was necessary for him to continue his search. How deeply he felt that! No matter how often he failed, he must not cease in his efforts. He must take up the cross and carry it in the face of the greatest obstacles. Should he fail a hundred times, it was his duty. For years and years it had been his duty. One knew that he felt that, though he had a curious inability to argue. All that he could say was that he must find his brother, he had no other help.

But what a gloom there was over them all, on herself already gloomy. Papa himself had given up all effort finally to be cheerful and was quite dispirited. He was no

longer himself, even his moustache drooped and his topmost lock of hair was quite flattened out, was dethroned. The general gloom he felt, the same gloom that in Margaret pressed back against her heart with so much pain, her own particular cloud, making that more and more of a dead weight. Of what that general gloom consisted altogether she could not guess. She could not know all its ingredients, she felt. Something was always lacking. This and that occurred to her but none sufficient, nor their sum total. But if that family mood were lightened, her own particular mood would be lighter. If the family—this occurred to her as an ingredient of the gloom—were more like other families on the settlement, were, that is, of country blood? In what way were they benefitted by being of 'pure transatlantic blood?' Simone had intended that quotation from the rector as a compliment and Margaret had with gratitude kept in mind the intention. But might not more people come to see them if they had 'a little Indian' in them, to use Mistress Denny's expression? And might not mamma if she had had 'a little Indian' in her more easily have retained her former friends, who nearly all had 'a little Indian' in them?

So Margaret pressed and beat about among clouds and gloom, trying to lift all aside and putting out a fluttering hand to set in motion again the gold thread, to continue that work of art, which it is true had not been before her a great deal since that day when it had been whisked out of sight on the sudden appearance of Koominah Koush, so living and so luminous, though so much in that first moment himself like a beautiful work

of art, like a beautiful portrait, in perfection of pose, of colouring, lines and attire. Trying to ease that memory now become a part of her cloud, by thrusting the knives savagely into the earth, she worked away with Timothy. They were just done and the knives were bright and shining when her father came to them in a rush and told her she ought not to be doing that, to go put on her bonnet, they were all going to the Fort. Quick. Quick.

To the Fort! To the Fort! Quick, quick she jumped up from the earth and in that swift rebound gloom and clouds went scattering. She could hardly dress, her fingers fumbled over the buttons and tangled over bonnet strings, but when she came forth shortly, her heart was bright and shining, unmarred by soil, mist or mystery as any of the knives, keen and glowing as any, all the way to the Fort—and for a few minutes afterwards, only.

One could not complain that papa was not generous enough. He allowed them each to select something at the store which each particularly wanted. Margaret chose a pair of 'English shoes' as all footwear other than moccasins were designated. Her first pair of English shoes which she prized greatly were small gaiters with elastic sides. Her mother secured a dress length of silk, the boys new clothes, Don a complete suit of his own!

At the Fort they saw Roger MacLachlin. But he did not approach them! He avoided them. There was no doubt of it. Standing at one side, his eyes purposely averted.

It was incomprehensible and certainly hurt her more, much more than Simone's odd salutation—Simone the

generous-hearted, the refined—which she seemed to address to the whole family, not alone to Don—'Hi—there,' making a sort of funnel of her hands—'remember what I'm tellin' ye—stick to the coo lad—stick to the coo.'

Did Simone appear to be making her own step-father the subject of jest? That too was incomprehensible but, though Don winced, Margaret was occupied too deeply, far too deeply with her own bitter disappointment.

They were extremely handsome shoes. At home again she kissed her father and thanked him for the beautiful present. She would be quite fine now, she told him. The shoes were just what she had always wanted. There was nothing more now in the world that she desired, she declared, laughing. Nothing.

Was she sure, nothing?

Nothing papa, nothing whatever.

She was a most delighted daughter. Her eyes shone black almost and her cheeks were flaming. She recalled, taking up her father's lapsed rôle, many amusing incidents of the shopping expedition, one, at least, that did not happen. And they had seen Mistress Currie sitting down on the ground outside the Fort eating wild turnips with some squaws.

'That was another day,' Don said in surprise.

'I do not believe it ever happened,' her mother declared witheringly.

Margaret bit her lip. Perhaps, perhaps she was mistaken. One moment it looked as if she were going to cry, the next, she went on with more gay chatter.

She was determinedly gay. Even in private. The ter-

rible blow of Koominah Koush not speaking to her at all, after all she had been led to think, stirred up in her resolute pride calculated to crush everything else.

She would put on the shoes and make a toilet in keeping with them. She would be bright, happy, though the skies fell. So she donned her best muslin patterned with violets, below which frilled pantalettes fluttered, spent a long time arranging her hair in ringlets, magnificently, as never before. She would be beautiful, exquisite, indifferent, yet brilliant. The old passivity, all that was expected of a young lady, would be a thing of the past. She would startle all with her vivacity, her scintillating brightness.

She sat down on the bed to do it, moistened her lips vigorously and moulded them into perfectly formed if quite soundless words.

'Yes, I remember you, I do indeed, sir.' Brightly she seemed to address a point on the wall, which answered abruptly yet much to the point.

'My heart is at your feet.'

She looked down at her feet, then up again in disdain.

'It lies bleeding—you are cruel—I shall go away.'

'Doubtless there are other regions more desirable than this.'

'Would you like to see the mountains?'

'Papa described the mountains beautifully, even more beautifully than he describes Niagara Falls.'

'Your father has been everywhere.'

'Papa travels a great deal.'

'It is a pleasant way to employ oneself.'

'Oh, not just for pleasure. He has a particular object.'

'Indeed?'

'Oh—but I cannot tell.'

The conversation continued in a fragmentary way with great haughtiness on her part and simple adoration on the part of the point until all at once a tear fell on one of her shoes. These being brought to her attention again, she began once more to admire them excessively. They were extremely handsome held this way and that. So neat, so compact, so glistening. Glistening too much in one spot. She bent and wiped off the tear, then sat up again. Graceful effects could be obtained by pointing, arching, curving the foot variously. Bringing the two feet together gave the best effect of all, perhaps, merely to have the shoes peeping from under the long flowing pantalettes.

Another tear fell on the other shoe, but she paid no attention to this at all, for all at once the point on the wall, so static to begin with, had detached itself from the wall altogether, and, taking the form of a young man, was sitting beside her on the bed (an impropriety which escaped her) and was soon talking to her in a strongly sympathetic vein.

'I would do anything to help Miss Moore. I would that I could be of assistance to your father.' (In the manner of spirits he understood the secret without being informed.) 'If I could think of anything. We could, perhaps, together think of some plan, perhaps?'

'Possibly,' she replied, sadly, in spite of his generosity.

'Let us endeavour—let us endeavour, I beg of you, Miss Moore,' he breathed faintly, 'to think hard together.'

But concluding his idea, merely, he faded away before it was brought to a test. For Margaret began to weary of her fiction—there was little satisfaction in it after all—and throwing it off and all its accessories stood up, the airy partnership dissolved, and stared ahead blankly, stared and stared blankly, until with a sudden cry, acclaiming a joyous reality, she rushed to the window. Someone was coming! Someone had passed her window. A man. She had seen his form just as he was disappearing. She could not see him now. But—he had come into the house! She heard him talking to her mother. Could it be——?

Rapidly she began to brush her hair, to smooth her gown. She looked wretched—in spite of the elaborate curls—the new shoes——

Never had she looked so wretched.

Chapter XVI

SHE was at the door listening.

Mr. Johnson! There was no mistaking the tones.

He had not left the settlement? The Governor had long since departed.

Mr. Johnson had come. No one else. Why——?

But what difference?

She went back to the window, dully, laden by the same cloud and the same gloom as before, her straining eyes reaching out to the green trees, the grass, the river, to the blue dome above crowning all with brightness. Brightness lay all about on grass, trees and river, was focused in the emerald flash of a humming bird in the air, in a fluffy pannicle of wild grass, in a spar of golden rod among low leafage, brightness, incorporate and made fully manifest in Don, passing, pursuing the even tenor of his ways, guiding an ox drawing a barrel of water on a *travois*. Don a solid mass of cheerfulness, unhastening and unresting as the ball of sun itself, while she, a wounded spirit, pressed still and beat about among a growing cloud and growing gloom, seeking to lift them aside, returning automatically to this attempt after having assured herself of the identity of the visitor—and putting a finger on the same suspicion as before.

They were different. The family were different to no purpose. Mr. Johnson a stranger with no connection, no

interest at all in the colony would not know. He had come—to talk of Ireland, perhaps? But no one else—since the rector, in duty bound. And this morning Roger MacLachlin had not spoken to them, had avoided them.

They were different and people talked about them.

To-day her father had twigged her mother's ear and patted her hand and told her to forget foolish gossip. *They* were always putting a bad name on someone.

But still there was that infinite dolour in mamma's eyes, even though Harry had gone whom she so disliked. She had a fine courage, yet——

Papa had a fine courage, yet sometimes in the midst of a rare burst of liveliness he would cease laughing and talking abruptly and stare into space. Was he, in spite of what he had said, incurably sensitive himself to those hidden disloyalties, hinted at, perhaps fully revealed by her mother?

'Sure,' he had said, 'I thought they were my friends, everyone.'

How friendly all had appeared indeed, the day of his return. But it seemed now that some or all talked of papa, attached to his name indeed some particular dishonour. Why mamma had told him when she knew it was not true was one of the many things not clear. But there had been something, some rumour still hovered about them. Not the rumour suggested by Mistress Denny's speech. Margaret had rejected that once and for all, blaming herself finally more than anone else for thinking of it.

But there was some rumour, something else, setting

them apart, isolating them, making them more and more different, making them unhappy, so that there was nothing standard about them at all. For even if they had not a little Indian in them, if they had been a happy family of any type they would not be so shunned as they appeared to be.

Happiness in themselves was what they needed to bring further happiness. And they had it not. There was something. Some subtle disharmony. Mamma had a fine courage, yet—— And papa had a fine courage yet he too was weighed down by something, by some unkind rumour, by disloyalty among his friends. Perhaps, too, she put her finger on this all at once, by a sense of failure.

A sense of failure, of all the years he had left them alone during which long time he had accomplished nothing? Did he now feel hopeless? A suspicion of that? Did he feel that it was of no use trying to find his brother?

This suspicion coming to her, one that she had not felt before at all, she twisted her fingers in sorrow.

Why, why—genuinely alarmed, the suspicion being confirmed, *he might not be going away again at all!* He was making no arrangements. None whatever. Usually on returning he made arrangements to go away again. This time, she realized in dismay, there had been no hint of such preparations. None whatever.

Could it be, truly, that he had given up? Could it be that her gold thread which, while in operation, had been drawing together so many disconnected and jagged patches, which had been about to standardize them

slightly with an uncle, could it be that her gold thread which had explained a good deal, if not everything—she saw that now—which had been lying idle during her father's furlough, but which she liked to have in reserve, to resort to at times, was drooping from its purpose altogether? Was its whole future existence in danger, in fact, because in her mother's mind—some words began to have this meaning now—it was not a gold thread at all but a black thread? Papa's brother was not worth it, she had said; and, previously, the game was not worth the candle.

Could these hard words and all she had said the day of the storm be keeping papa from preparing to go away again?

That was wrong. Wrong. It was necessary for him to continue his search. He felt that deeply. He had remained at home against his conscience. It was wrong. Wrong. No matter how often he failed he must not cease in his efforts, surrounded with difficulties though they were. He must go. He must take up his cross and carry it in the face of the greatest obstacles. Should he fail a hundred times it was his duty. For years and years it had been his duty. Though so hard.

'He must take up his cross——' she murmured, beginning to roam about the little room. 'He must take up his cross——' And she must take up her cross—she must take up her cross, she told the walls, repeating and repeating the phrase, walking about the cubicle of a room as in a cage. If there was not brightness anywhere, she must manufacture it. One should at all times be happy—one should—one should—she must take up *her*

cross and carry it, she told herself over and over again; finally dropping down like a stone on the bed and beginning, as under hard compulsion to play with her shoes, admiring them forcibly. They were handsome, held this way—and that. They were. They were. They were so neat, so compact, so glistening. Graceful effects could be obtained by pointing, arching, curving the foot variously. Graceful effects indeed. Bringing her feet together gave the best effect of all perhaps. Merely to have the shoes peeping from under the frilled pantalettes.

One must take up one's cross. If she were only outside, now that she was attired! She stood up. But she did not wish to walk past Mr. Johnson, and she did not wish to to be held in conversation with him. And she had not been asked to appear. But it might help if she were outside by the river. There a cross might be cleansed of its worst thorns (no, that was a crown—but what difference?) or one might even drop it into the flowing stream and see it vanish.

Gladly she would see it vanish. Gladly. And sometimes when she had gazed long into the river she had not felt so restless. Beside its clear flowing, problems had been cleansed of their worst irritation. Indeed she had once or twice left a problem in care of the river, in solution, had gone away and forgotten about it, come back and found it gone. A problem no more.

Pat, Bob and Tim hurried by, chasing butterflies. Oh, happy days of childhood! Happy, happy days of childhood. Never, never would they come again. Those days of long ago when she used to dream calmly by the river (looking back they seemed calm) would never come again.

But she must think of something pleasant, empty her mind of all those suspicions which brought her no peace. Ah, her mother and Mr. Johnson were talking of Ireland. She had caught that word. Perhaps they would not talk long for her mother did not talk much of Ireland, rarely spoke, indeed, of her childhood days, rarely hinted at their happiness—all childhood days were happy. A sentence or two only in Margaret's memory had stepped out of the vagueness, which was her mother's happy childhood days.

'At least we have the sky,' she had said once long ago, implying a comparison, Margaret supposed between the scenery of Ireland which mamma had liked and that of the prairie. Another sentence on opening the door in spring after a long winter. 'It is almost like bathing in the salt sea waves.'

'The salt sea waves.' Margaret, very young at the time, had had difficulty in envisaging 'salt sea waves' at all, startling excrescences on a standard scenery made entirely of salt; equal difficulty in envisaging her mother bathing in them.

'Would you like to return to Ireland, mamma, and live there?' Margaret had once asked.

'What, and poverish to death? A fine notion that.'

No, all mamma's memories of Ireland were not happy—but papa's were, even if he, too, had been very poor. Better think of that. Papa loved to talk of his boyhood days and of Ireland. He had been pleased to meet Mr. Johnson on that account—whereas mamma liked neither to talk of Ireland, nor to Mr. Johnson, because she had suspected——

But that was foolish. Civilities were after all merely civilities. Mamma had overestimated his notice of her, Margaret—ordinary gallantry.

'I regret, sir, that she has had no opportunity for equestrian exercises,' mamma said stiffly, and so loud that Margaret heard it distinctly through the door.

Could they be talking about her? No, doubtless not. Mamma was merely embracing the opportunity of making use of her cultivated manner.

How agreeable that mamma should have the opportunity (as long as it did not last much longer). One should think of all such pleasant things.

Ah, papa had come in! She heard him and her manufactured animation vanished. Papa would talk to Mr. Johnson forever—about Ireland.

They talked and talked. Mamma called out loudly once, 'Give her an inch and she'll take a mile.'

They talked and talked and every cloud and every vague suspicion encompassed Margaret and weighed her down again, even while she held another determined inspection of her shoes. Her first English shoes! Could it be for a moment that she had forgotten them! So pretty held this way—and that—so neat—so compact—so glistening. Then distraught, indeed forgetting them, she was looking up at the wall, her eyes big and heavy and was moistening her lips when she heard her father go out again; and the next minute her mother entered the room, closing the door after her.

Chapter XVII

HER mother was quite agitated, yet she had that manner.

'Mr. Johnson wishes to see you.'

'Me, mamma—ME!'

'Yes, dear,' loftily.

'But I cannot—I cannot see him,' Margaret bleated, sinking into a little heap on her bed.

'Don't be foolish.' Her mother sat down beside her very erect. 'You are of an age—and your father has decided to allow you to see Mr. Johnson alone.'

'ALONE?'

'Yes, dear—don't speak so loud.'

'But, mamma—I do not think—I do not think—I—I——' Inadvertently she emitted a tiny shriek.

'Hush. With regard to the matter Mr. Johnson shall place before you, your father wishes you to use your own discretion.'

The matter? What matter? Her own discretion? She had no discretion. She had never heard of it before. 'But, mamma—I cannot go out there,' she floundered, gasping. 'My health—my health——'

'Your health?'

'My spirits—my spirits, mamma, are too low to admit of my encountering so complete a stranger.' She let slip another tiny shriek.

'Hush. You must.'

Margaret became suddenly petrified. What did Mr. Johnson wish to see *her* about? There was only one thing. Her mother—was right.

Her face paper white, her lips bloodless, Margaret stood up and began to comb her hair wildly.

'That will do. You were very well as you were.'

'But, mamma,' letting the comb fall to the floor, she went over and threw her arms around her mother, sobbing. 'Tell me what to say.'

Her mother pushed her off. 'Consult your own desires and make what end of his declaration you wish. You are no longer a child. At your age—I——'

But, mamma, I cannot marry him—you do not think —you do not like—you tell him.'

'This has been taken from my hands before the eyes of Mr. Johnson. Take your hands from your face. Wipe your eyes and go. The sooner begun, the sooner ended—and I am obliged to say,' she plucked the words out of herself with an expression of pain, yet in a carefully modulated voice. 'I am obliged to confess that Mr. Johnson is a gentleman of excellent address—and of great wealth.'

'Oh—oh—I do not wish——' Margaret breathed in agony. 'Oh—oh——'

'No more nonsense. You must go,' her mother rapped out, and without further ado opened the door, thrust her daughter out and shut the door again.

Mr. Johnson, the epitome of grace and elegance, stood in the middle of the room. On the appearance of a small, terrified figure with eyes cast down, ringlets cast down, new shoes hardly peeping from under her frilled

pantalettes he advanced intoning, 'Delighted, I assure you.'

With a faint greeting Margaret sat down near the open door.

Mr. Johnson then sat down and after folding and unfolding a large heavily perfumed handkerchief spoke, 'I trust that I have not disturbed you unduly, Miss Moore.'

Margaret whispered negatively, dared to look up, saw the alert eyes of a lozenge-shaped face feeding on her and looked down again. Despair seized her—helpless, rudderless, cast adrift by her own parents. Why—why had she been given this liberty of choice? Her father, in particular, wished her to use her own discretion. It was unheard of. She had no discretion. She had never formed a resolution of any importance in her life. Never before had such been expected of her. Her mother, party to this scheme—too—who had never allowed her——

'It is as well.' Mr. Johnson gave forth his offer with admirable boldness and promptitude, 'to be brief, Miss Moore. I come to ask your hand in marriage.'

'Oh, sir!'

'You are startled? You wonder? Permit me to explain. I have seen in you, Miss Moore, besides a rare beauty of face and form, something not of your habitat, something fitted to grace another sphere than this.'

'Oh, sir—you honour me.'

'So modest, so demure. But with my assistance, Miss Moore, you will soon be enabled to take your place in the society in which I move.'

'Oh, sir—you are—in error.'

'And I believe as well that you will find engrossing the diversions and gratifications of the cities of the old world—the operas——'

'But, sir,' Margaret astonished herself (as well as her mother listening at the crack of the door imperceptibly ajar) by quoting from the old reader, bound in brown leather and dog-eared which she had used at Mrs. Toll's Academy—'but, sir, a multitude of gratifications and diversions weaken the sense of pleasure and a number of objects crowded on the mind at once detract from the power of perception.'

Mr. Johnson was amused. '"A number of gratifications,"' he mimicked in a girlish voice, '"and diversions weaken the sense of pleasure, and a number of objects crowded on the mind at once detract from the power of perception"—I should have thought, Miss Moore, after having been so long reduced to your own company, charming as that is, you would welcome the opportunity of mingling with people of station and breeding.'

'But I assure you, sir, I am happy in my present situation.'

'Pardon me, Miss Moore, if you had the opportunity of knowing the attractions to which I refer——' Rising, he came over to her and dropping to the floor gracefully disposed himself on one knee. 'Consent, I implore you, Miss Moore, to share your loveliness with me.'

'Oh, I beg of you, sir——' His face was very near, his warm breath suddenly she felt on her downcast eyes.

'I offer you, sweet one, a luxurious home, a palace, servants, carriages.'

But Margaret had sprung up, puffing, her face in flames. Coming to the middle of the room she looked imploringly towards the door of her own bedroom which had creaked.

'Oh, sir, I would be alone.'

Nonplussed Mr. Johnson had risen. 'There is no need, Miss Moore,' glancing with narrowed eyes towards the bedroom door—'there is no need to be alarmed, I assure you. I have overwhelmed you with the suddenness of a great prospect.'

'You have indeed, sir.'

'Then I shall be delighted, Miss Moore, to give you some moments to consider—without interruption—if you so desire.'

'But I have already given you, sir——' Margaret began—then stopped, abruptly—the remainder of her sentence crumbling before a shattering, inbreaking light.

Was it to occupy such a station as this that she had been trained——?

In deportment—in correct speech? Protected in every way, her skin, her hair, her hands—that she had always bathed her face in purest rain water—in winter in melted snow, strained through a pure, white cloth. That her mother had insisted on all this—always—observing a religion of the toilet.

All that infinite care—her mother's life work—for this—something better than she had planned even?

Twisting her fingers in the folds of her gown, Margaret still looked down helplessly. Two full minutes elapsed in deadly silence; at the end of which time Mr.

Johnson, coughing politely, took out his watch and held it in his hand.

The sands of time were sinking—to what—to what?

Margaret cast another anguished glance at the bedroom door, in vain—and another outside—then uttered a suppressed exclamation of joy. Out there was her father right at the front. He would—would enter—perhaps?

An Indian ran up to him with a letter. He took it, looked at it and gave the Indian a coin. The Indian went away. Her father broke the seal, was reading the contents and, absorbed, moved away.

Margaret stepped to the door. 'Papa,' she called in a hoarse, desperate whisper.

But he was gone—hurrying rapidly away.

A blank—she seemed to see nothing, turned her glance inward—and saw not Mr. Johnson—saw no one, but felt an unseen presence and in a dream heard a sentence formed, that first sentence in the world, filling the room like leaves fluttering——

Or did those flutterings come from without——? Her eyes fled to the river, the quiet river.

Across, Madeleine was dabbling in the water, dabbling dreamily—invoking in liquid notes days spent far from the settlement—long ago—days of her girlhood—braves arriving victorious—deep feastings—long journeys in the open.

Mr. Johnson's world so far away. Airless, artificial, a bewildering rush—she knew not what? No, no, she did not harmonize with that in spite of all her training.

'A colony where there are no lawyers, no tailors, no modistes,' Mr. Johnson broke in in a slight lull in the turmoil of Margaret's soul. 'Believe me, Miss Moore, you were never intended for this peptic mud—this settlement with its quality of descendantalism.' The voice mocked, grew intimate—and he moved towards her again.

Margaret stepped back, all at once, hard. A tight, hard, little bud. What did he mean? To disparage her home—her family—the ways of the people—all the people—the world she knew—music across the river—the river itself, recipient of her sorrows, her reveries, her joys—sunsets all over the sky—changing seasons—whiteness and now, tinkling bells—afterwards the imperishable world coming to view again in so full a measure—flowers all over the prairie—the prairie that crooned and crooned—stretching far—far——

'I would know your answer now, Miss Moore.' Mr. Johnson shut his watch with a click—and something at that moment seemed to rise from his pallid surface like a hot wind, filling the room, something as distressing to Margaret as it was unnamed, and against which she immediately sent a repellent surge that cleared her brain of its last vestige of doubt, of everything but first essentials, its deepest branding.

'I have been taught to believe, sir,' her eyes met his levelly, 'that there is happiness beyond the power of such fortune as you describe.'

'Indeed—very well—I bid you good-day,' and with a speed and lack of ceremony in no way forecasted, which Margaret could not have believed possible in him, Mr.

Johnson departed, sending into her a look which she felt in her very marrow.

Gone—she fled to the door after him, filled with swift torture.

But he was indeed gone—in a flash—and had not looked behind.

She sat down at the door, shaken, diddering. Had she done right? Oh, had she done right. What had she before her? What had they wanted her to do? Oh, the way he had looked——

Her mother opened the door and came out. 'I am pleased, Margaret. I did not wish you to go—so far away—but to use your own discretion.'

Her father leapt in. 'You did well, Maggie,' he sang out. 'Sure, you did well——'

'Her own self,' her mother said.

'Didn't I tell you,' her father demanded, 'her own self.'

Both gazed fondly at her. Like tiger and tigress padded and purred around her.

'I feel bound to say,' there might have been a note of regret in her mother's voice and again there might not, 'that Mr. Johnson is a gentleman of excellent address.'

'He is that—he is that.'

'You must be fatigued, Margaret. Go, rest.'

'Oh, no, no, mamma—I could not rest. Oh—a breath of air.'

'As you wish.'

'Sure, that's right, a bit of air—a bit of air—it'll do her good.'

Margaret fled to the river—at last.

Chapter XVIII

Out on a clear point in full view of the shining stream where a breeze cooled her hot face and soothed her eyes Margaret stood a long time immovable, indulging in great relief, greater much than the removal of her last anxiety alone accounted for.

A disturbing occurrence was over, the first of its kind in her life, agitating her beyond measure. That was over —without ill effect, one hoped. And she had done right. It was not necessary for her to go away—to leave everyone. She need leave no one. That was not required of her. For some minutes that barren prospect had stared her in the face. Now it was gone. Mr. Johnson was a gentleman of wealth and of good quality, but she had done right in refusing him, in using her own discretion.

How taxed she had been, how battered with indecision. Now it was all over and she was free, free to feel the good air on her face, toneful, with the music of the plains behind it, aromatic with the mellow odours of midsummer; free above all to commune with the river, as with a kindred soul at some time or place perhaps narrowly escaped, as herself here and now from being turned aside and embogged in low lying flats, bending wisely from that fate, steadily keeping on a better course.

A better course. In her case, too. A much better course, whatever it was, although all had seemed bad enough before—a much better course. Communing so success-

fully once more with the river, the plains, the trees, the air, that later at the supper table her face had lost its hectic flush, from her eyes had been drawn much stress and she was able to chat, in a detached manner to be sure, of a humming bird she had just seen—it was a day of humming birds. One had appeared at her feet poised on a low twig. She had never seen one so near before. So rapidly its wings vibrated they seemed to be still. Its red throat! So tiny a bird! A jewel—an emerald—with a ruby inset—in colouring, in brilliance. Chatting of this tiny being, thinking of much larger beings, she filled her father's pauses.

For he too, after a long period of apathy, appeared to be flowing in a better course—bubbling with words.

'Good stroke—good stroke—that. A whole dozen—good workers, everyone——'

After awhile to Margaret occupied with her own relief and her own vivacious spirits it became clear that her father had finally cajoled (offering as special inducement a keg of whiskey) a dozen half-breed women into promising to cut the wheat when it would be ready. He was greatly pleased on that account, she saw, as well as the fact that he did not want her to journey to a far country, because of her decision, although wishing her to decide for herself, recognizing more than she did doubtless, all that Mr. Johnson's offer meant.

But Don would be greatly pleased by the prospect of assistance in the harvest. She looked aside at him—and caught her breath. A shock. Don was not pleased. A short time ago she had thought him the essence of cheerfulness—but something now lurked in the droop of his

mouth, in his eyes. And even as she considered him, he gave vent to an alarming gaucherie. 'Here you,' to Patrick on the other side of him, 'don't stick your hoofs into my withers.'

'Oh, Don,' Margaret admonished him confidently, a sister of great experience. A thousand years in fact separated her from the child she had been a few hours ago.

But Don paid no attention, be she ever so aged, elaborated rather on his manner by eating his food with much noise and quaffing off a cup of milk with a reverberating gurgle, that amounted indeed to a gargle.

'First fruit of the soil,' his father commented cheerfully.

Don rose from the table—his eyes were like two candles without wicks, lighted and running riot—and stamped out.

After supper her father seized a quill and began to mend it as best he could with a table knife.

'Post paper?' he enquired gently of Margaret.

Margaret hastened to look for post paper. There was a small quantity in a box on the beam in the corner. Papa had received a letter. Incredible that she should have forgotten that. Papa rarely received a letter. No one else in the family ever. Had he good news? Another reason for his good humour.

Ordinarily the whole family was thrown into a high state of excitement when papa received a letter—though the children never knew the contents.

'Why write?' her mother asked.

Her father threw down his quill.

'You could reach Grassy Point as soon as a letter.'

'Sure and I could do that.' He rose and walked around, encompassing the perimeter of the room in a few strides.

'This is the latest record?'

'It is that. It is as clear now as the sun at noonday, from what is set down in the letter.'

'Then why not go yourself?'

Her father stood still.

'It vexes me——' he said in a queer voice, 'to leave again—so soon—the way you would be worrying.'

'If it was not for a necessary and compulsory cause——'

He stared at mamma intently a moment, then going over and thumping the table he proclaimed in a heavy voice, 'Well, then, I go.'

A brigade of boats would shortly leave for the North. He lost no time in bespeaking a passage, Grassy Point being on their route, and began at once to make other preparations for the journey.

'It's a good trace. It's a good trace,' he exulted, enigmatically to all but her mother and Margaret, in whom rebounded some of the pleasure of knowing the secret and a great deal of the pleasure of knowing that her father was soon to be about the business of his life. And already his demeanour wore the imprint of success. 'I'll engage to win this time,' he declared happily. The mere thought of entering the contest, into the unknown world (one thought of it that way) unmasked his mettle, his vim and all his former graces.

And family life rallied wonderfully and immediately. Don blossomed forth into extravagant optimism that

same evening, prophesying areas of wheat stretching westward for miles, steamboats, railroads—and a large city touching on their own property. And papa said, 'Yes, yes, my boy,' and mamma smiled. All chafing and irritation vanished.

The gold thread recaptured, the old heavy family mood lifted, the pressure of this against her heart released, the consideration of Mr. Johnson's proposal completed and her decision approved, the proposal itself, its importance altogether, gave her thoughts at least a better course—a much better course.

Mr. Johnson's proposal had been quite upsetting, but now that it was over she found it not a little flattering. Not a little stimulating. From a far country this gentleman had come and seeing her straightway became infatuated. Deeply infatuated. He had seen in her 'besides a rare beauty of face and form, something fitted to adorn another sphere than this.' Even if he did not think highly of life as lived on the rivers he was a gentleman of fine taste, 'of excellent address', and wealthy. He could pick and choose.

She had been honoured, greatly honoured. She wished now that in refusing him she had been if possible more cordial. The memory of her behaviour at one moment, the most critical indeed, brought her some discomfiture. Mr. Johnson had been progressing with much grace—had mamma been present he could not have acquitted himself more artistically—when he had had the ill-luck to overreach himself slightly, when he had in fact almost fallen on top of her. Doubtless undisturbed he would have righted himself directly and continued a

peerless declaration. But she had interrupted. She had grown panicky and had jumped up—which was both rude and regrettable. She might as easily have refused him on his knees, if he had deemed it fitting to remain on them, as in any other posture—in fact—perhaps—? She might have refused him as easily, more easily perhaps, on his knees than standing for instance with one arm around her, pressing her ever so slightly; a posture for proposing which Simone, the majority of the girls at school, during a heated discussion, had favoured as most modern fitting. 'Full of grace,' Simone had said, standing with her arm around Margaret, demonstrating, 'the suitor stands—thus—full of grace.'

However, coming back to the whole bewildering experience of Mr. Johnson after a few days when it was still bewildering enough, it seemed to her that if his proposal lacked anything that was to some extent her own fault; and she sighed that one letter of polite behaviour on her part should have been sacrificed unnecessarily—to read the meaning of a passing sigh.

Had her refusal hurt him? His eyes, his glaucous stare in parting, the omission of that profound and cultivated obeisance which had terminated with so much charm his previous visit were not pleasant recollections. However she was sure that in the course of time he would realize that their union was unwise, as unwise for him as for her.

If she could have said a little more. But he had gone so quickly, giving her no opportunity, after honouring her so greatly, after reinstating the family in a measure as well. For after all there could be little wrong with

them. His was not merely the call of a visiting Irishman who knew nothing of them, or people of similar transatlantic blood. He had proposed to form an undissolvable union with them!

Her suspicions had been groundless. The family was not being avoided because of rumours. The family was not being avoided. Others would come to see them—soon. There were reasons, which shortly would—explain——?

In the meantime everyone was very busy—as well as themselves. Her father's purposed penetration into northern wilds required a fresh equipment. Under her mother's direction she began to sew and to knit. The neighbours were even more interested in the departure of the brigade, many going as oarsmen. Prosper Basson, it was said, would guide the boats.

All were busy and activities flowed from one side of the river to the other. Some came to borrow, some to give. A potion made by Madeleine from the bark of wild cherry, a cure for colds and a salve by Julie from Balm of Gilead were among the parting gifts to Major Moore, to *ritjiwam* (brother-in-law) Madeleine's native word of regard for a special friend.

So busy a time. Not only were the *Métis* making ready for this voyage, by lakes and rivers to York Factory to meet there the ship sailing overseas, but by far the greater number were now making ready in genuine earnest for the Fall Hunt. Tents spread out on the ground were being mended, harness was being repaired, guns were being cleaned and polished.

Everyone at home and in the neighbourhood, every-

one in the colony was busy and in the midst of their own cheerful hum Margaret herself worked and thought.

It was a great advance to be allowed one's own choice of husband. A great advance. Her parents had commended her answer to Mr. Johnson, which she knew now, both had heard distinctly, mamma from the bedroom, papa from the back door where he had gone after receiving the letter. Since that day both had spoken to her differently. She was no longer a child, she was 'of an age'—was now much experienced and more than ever able to manage her own affairs.

That discovery of her new status, her own discovery, was hardly less pleasing than the fresh proof that she was attractive along immemorial lines, that she was a young woman of romance as well as discretion—and that the inevitable fate of such lay not far away.

She trembled slightly at the thought, and once more inordinate vanity palpitated through her and had to be suppressed; yet in spite of all her efforts a host of admirers would insist on presenting themselves again and again and each in turn prostrate 'in the peptic mud', ask her hand in marriage. And heading the procession there was always, most abject in adoration, the one whom she had imagined gloomily, previous to Mr. Johnson's visit, had had no desire to make any advance whatever in her direction.

A suspicion, which with many others, was now miraculously fading away.

So she thought and worked, bending over her work, in a fine confident mood, much less of a personality blurred in her expression than ever before—and dreamed.

Shortly her father would leave with the brigade. The family would accompany him to the point of embarkation. There again one would see one's friends.

'A lake of living water'—'when the plains look up to the high hills'—'You are wise—you are brave. Your heart is as the heart of the reindeer'—'If you have chosen while here a pale princess as your bride——'

Endless dreaming in the meantime; while the family itself conformed almost to a completely happy type. Several pleasant evenings by the fireside before her father left. A parent's absence normally is to be regretted, but in this case since it was so unwilling it shed the sheen of its martyrdom, on her especially, as the gaiety of his songs, his laughter reflected on all.

But those evenings when family life was at its crest were all too few. The time was so short, papa had so many arrangements to make, and was often away so late. One night he met with a misfortune. He had been standing on the bank of the river, talking to another man, when he had accidentally fallen in. Once moist, as he said, he had thought it wise to continue so. Accordingly he swam the whole distance home, four miles or more.

He explained it all gaily as he stood before them, dripping with water, blown in the open doorway with a gust of wind that sent the candle guttering into a drunken flame.

'And is it that you left your horse to come home, alone?' mamma enquired.

'Gad, I forgot!' Soaked as he was he started towards the door.

'He's in the stable safe and sound,' Don called from above.

'Came home by himself, sober as a judge,' mamma said. A singular thing to say about a horse.

'If you could see the true state of yourself,' mamma said.

Papa did appear comical. His face was ruddy and damp, his hair was hanging in dark tails, his clothes were sticking to him and his feet in their wet, stretched mocassins looked like the webbed feet of ducks.

'Didn't I tell you it happened in the performance of my jooty, woman?'

He could hardly speak plainly and he was so weak and wobbly.

'If you cannot spend your last evenings in family assembly,' mamma told him, 'go to bed.'

A jarring note, the only one of that sort in this period of preparation and that not prolonged. For the next morning papa rose early, before dawn in fact, and went away without his breakfast to order a store of wood for fires during his absence—as he told them when he came home—and mamma was appeased.

Chapter XIX

For a week or more it rained steadily. The morning of the great day when the Company's brigade would leave with passengers and freight to meet at York Factory the last ship of the year sailing overseas, it had ceased, but the air was still muggy and the roads in a quagmire. Walking was slower than usual, and much slower than riding. Mother and children arrived at the landing an hour after Major Moore on Adam, to find the space outside the walls of the Fort, and the water's edge, filled already with a boisterous, surging crowd.

The brigade of eight huge row boats, riding at anchor was to be in charge of Prosper Basson who many times previously had brought similar fleets through tangled waterways, over boiling rapids, over rough and rocky *portages*. A stubby, oblate giant, conspicuous among the seventy or more half-breed *voyageurs,* all in their bravest apparel, conspicuous among the crowd.

Conspicuous too was Roger MacLachlin in his red coat, tall hat, dark, slim, straight, overseeing much and overseeing well. One realized his awareness of every detail.

Conspicuous Major Moore, clad in a new capote, sash and feathered cap. As a *voyageur* even more effective than as a plain hunter, though in that rôle as in all others it was his military erectness, his canty stride, his *bouffant* moustache that held the eye; and his air of

importance, occupied unceasingly as he was with matters of great moment, directing this and that, giving a weighty opinion here, another there. Joining Angus Currie in a lofty survey of the sky. Joining the robust Prosper in a similar survey. Bowing to ladies, greeting all, men and women from 'down the Red' and Frenchmen from across the river, with equal fervour. Conferring privately with Roger MacLachlin. Revelling, in short, in drama and imparting drama. Taking time now and again to speak to his family, who made on the whole quite a presentable appearance, thanks to recent additions to their wardrobes.

Because of the bad weather a great amount of goods were still to be loaded on the boats. A number of men, several abreast, hatless, coatless, tump lines around their heads, helping to sustain on each back a package of a hundred pounds upon which rested a similar package, were going down to the wharf. Time after time they bore down, strong and agile, muscles swelling, voices heaving with their movements. Time after time they bounded up again with lusty shouts, until all of the bales of fur were packed into the three-ton galleys, as well as luggage, bags of mail and provisions for the voyage.

Above, the sky was evenly grey, inscrutable in its colourless monotony, yielding to the many and frequent inspections no clue whatever to its future intentions. Far out from the rivers were those nebulous spaces which were the prairie, on the edge of which, near a fur company's post, a gathering of people watched a group of boats heavily laden, decorated with small red

flags, streaming ribbons and gaudy ensigns, depart on a long inland voyage. A simple scene, but an event of great importance to all, the one great link between themselves and a world beyond the seas. Fathers, brothers, lovers, friends, leaving on a journey that had its perils.

To Elizabeth Moore it was a great event. To no other could it have been greater. Yet no one in the crowd appeared more calm, more collected. Invested once more in the historic shawl and a new brown bonnet 'in the new pattern', she exposed at least no visible spots in her emotional armour, no loop holes in her reserve, her dignity, her erectness.

The smaller boys, stiff in new clothes, viewed the scene with solemn, owlish eyes. Don, too, somewhat rigid for the same reason, yet bending, responding to Fanny Currie's sallies so brilliantly that Margaret looked at him in surprise.

For Fanny was there (all the Curries, big and little) swinging a gay parasol, one of the few if not the only one in the settlement, laughing and talking breezily (she had enough breeziness to supply all of the future West and may have been the original source) and playing a trick on Donovan. Quite by accident she slid a piece of hard mud into the pocket of that land-obsessed young man, who when she offered with profuse apologies to withdraw it allowed her to do so, then requested her to give it back to him, saying it was just what he needed.

Simone Laflamme, heavily beflounced, with waist of wasp, gurgled, 'Oh, *la*—Fan.' Little pats of sound passed on by dark, downy eyes to Donovan, smiling

to-day on Donovan, habited in a suit of heavy black cloth, of great solidity, warranted to remain solid for many years, in which dark, substantial casing his strength, ruddiness, long limbs took on a maturity beyond their years. 'A man,' Margaret thought for the first time, slightly surprised again from the tenseness which since their arrival was stretching her as on a rack. All one's friends about one, all moving about speaking to one another, some to whom she was not strictly attentive.

Fanny officiating in breeziness, Simone in velvety glances, their mother, 'Wild Rose', a child herself in applause whenever required; Colin, eldest son and heir, tepid, colourless, very near. All the Curries here to bid farewell, presumably to Duncan MacMillan, officer of the Company, and his wife, who were going to visit at the Scottish home of Mr. MacMillan's relatives. Mrs. MacMillan, a dusky, little lady 'of the country' who had never left Rupert's land before was excited. She had heard a great deal of her husband's former abode overseas, and she now divulged to all who cared to listen that in that ancestral home 'a score or more magnificent lustres poured forth their effulgence nightly'.

Mrs. Denny, undulating about in an over-sized hoop skirt, forced by its circumference a passage to Elizabeth Moore to whisper in her ear as white to white that she believed after all Charlotte MacRay, wife of Thomas, had a little Indian in her. Just take a look at her.

Elizabeth Moore did not look. Her petrification of manner in fact very soon sent Mrs. Denny off, ballooning off in her hoops, recovering air and audacity ere long.

To all of this Margaret was intensely indifferent, though the occasion had a keen, double-edged interest for her, the strain of which was rendering her very pale, but none the less lovely. Never indeed was her fair delicate beauty, the swooning loveliness of the softest lily ever grown, more remarkable, and never was it more remarked upon. Never were her eyes stabbing with deepest blue, the purity of her white skin more luminous, more intent, almost to anxiety.

Then her father brought Roger MacLachlin over to them. Her mother who had met him before was firmly cordial. Mr. MacLachlin expressed the pleasure he felt in meeting *all* of the family of Major Moore. He had been fortunate, he said, bowing, in having been able to be of service to Miss Moore on two occasions. He had hoped this good fortune might have continued—his eyes searched Margaret's, tragic almost in their intensity—but failing the opportunity—he paused, hesitated, stiffened, went on—as it was, in the meantime he was obliged to withdraw to his pressing duties.

'A gentleman of excellent address!' Elizabeth Moore said in surprise after he had gone and Margaret winced. Had she not used the same expression with reference to Mr. Johnson? A gentleman of excellent address, indeed. Excessively polite—but with a film over her eyes Margaret stared into the river water ahead of her, reflecting that sombre, inscrutable mask which was the sky. Dark, opaque, inscrutable too was the water—yet below that dead, glassy surface one knew were tremors, vagrant currents, gloom, chill, bitter waters even.

Bitterness? Was that in his dull, still glance. What a

dullness, what a stillness, in his whole attitude towards them—what bitterness in his first glance!

Had she looked forward to this moment ever since she had known her father was going away and the sum total of its gift to her was a look of bitterness? She shrank back into herself, her eyelids drooped. She examined her inward torture.

What would it mean? What had happened since first she had met him, since the day when that breath had come into being somehow—it must have come from Koominah Koush—that breath, that primary breath on which had lain so softly those words, simple words, yet possessing all the properties of life. 'I have been wanting to meet you.' Since that day—since the beginning—what?

Something had happened since then, since the day of her father's return even?

She opened her eyes and gazed forlornly on the water. So dull, a dead, glassy surface only—below which, however, were tremors, vagrant currents, gloom, chill bitterness.

Bitterness, she came back to that. But what could she do, when she knew not the cause? Yet—urged by her new confidence in herself, in her own discretion—she might do—something?

Go to him and speak to him? No. Never. Lovers came to one, prostrated themselves in the dust before one, 'in the peptic mud'. She had been anticipating a supreme employment of her discretion, she was proud of it, yet she would never go so far herself as to seek the object on which to use it. No, she could not go and

speak to him—she shrank timidly into herself at the thought—before everyone too—she could not—could not wander about aimlessly even—and accidentally find herself beside him. No, he must come to her.

But he was not coming again. It was incomprehensible—worse than previously.

But he must come. Her eyes lifted from the river and searched among the throng—and found him. Not engaged in his pressing duties at the moment but standing still, idly motionless. With an expression on his face which she could not name. There was a picture in her reader of a saint in a niche. His face had something of that saint's—was almost as lifeless—and all bitterness gone.

His whole attitude was arresting all her previous surmises—when her father approached, with his rocking gait, in a rush, his farewell rush.

The goods were at last all stored away in the stout boats. Passengers were being shown their places. A final regale of rum was accorded the crew.

Major Moore embraced his family, told Don in a thick voice to take care of them, then left them, his zeal for service expressing itself even in those last moments in *'allons donc'* to a husband lingering in uxorious caress, in *'gros chien'* to a bulky lover snatching final, furious kisses, his feather in his cap vibrating heartily. At last everything having been done or said that he could do or say, the Major leapt into his place in the leading boat.

The sash-girded *voyageurs* were all at their posts, steersmen, bowmen and middlemen. The boats moved

out into midstream around from the Assiniboine into the Red, there arranged in line and swept off with boom of song to measured stroke of oars.

'A la claire fontaine
M'en allant promener.'

On the banks the babel of *adieux* ceased, to listen to the song of the boatmen deploying in the air, to watch the water swirling, the path of foam.

Patrick, Robert and Tim (with a great number of other agile persons) ran along the bank with the brigade waving to their father, who was lifting his cap, flourishing it, whose fair hair was catching the light, whose high curl was fluttering up as long as they could see him.

The boats soon turned the bend and were lost to view. A wild strain floated back. *'Que je m'y suis baigné'*—and another—and another—repeated in a dying echo.

The brigade was out of sight, the air was mute, the watchers on the banks remained at attention as if loath to leave the air itself so recently breathed by friends just gone—as if listening still—?

Chapter XX

MARGARET and her mother, who had moved nearer the landing, were turning away—Margaret still looking about—when someone rushed by them, meteoric, swishing the silence. Roger MacLachlin, white at the nostrils, carrying a bundle and a paddle. At the water's edge he shot into a canoe, a fairy skiff of birch bark, ricochetting under his weight, sending up a shower of sparkling drops, then steadying under the sure touch and going off, like a bird on the water, impelled by an airy vermilion wing.

'Ho!' Angus Currie's huge voice rent the air. 'They forgot something.'

A cheer went up.

'See him fly. See him fly!'

'He'll catch them. He'll catch them.'

Spinning over the waters the fleet canoeist once waved his paddle in acknowledgement of the applause, once only, before disappearing around the projecting headland.

There could be but one ending to this swift chase. The pursuer would soon reach the pursued. But the crowd again waited after he was lost in view, this time, nodding, laughing, appreciatively, waiting as if impressing on one another and themselves the certainty of the invisible victory.

The Moores were among the first to leave, urged by

their mother, who, however, having reached the sodden road, walked more slowly, wearily, her shoulders drooping morosely. The boys, Patrick, Robert and Timothy, nimble as rabbits, ran on, leaping from one water hole to another. Beside her mother Margaret picked her way along, carefully, by force of habit—in spite of her care her English shoes took on another layer of mud—going forward carefully with her feet, bounding backwards with her mind and heart to her father, to Roger MacLachlin, at the last the cynosure of all eyes.

Don was ahead on Adam. Don, now master of the house and of the horse, was slapping ahead through mud and mire wildly. Soon they could no longer hear him, nor see him. The fog was growing. That vast nebulous space westward and northward was deepening to an acrid smoke, reaching to the wayfarers, enshrouding them and objects before their eyes, houses, tents, fences, trees. Soon Margaret and her mother, walking slowly, each deep in her own thoughts, could no longer see the boys ahead on foot—but could hear them chattering and breaking off branches from wild cherry trees for the fruit.

And Margaret, advancing more and more into the dark haze, advanced more and more into that mixed aura of bitterness, defiance, lastly of stillness, in which she had seen Roger MacLachlin, losing herself in it, an aura silvered over slightly by his going off with the forgotten bundle, a slight emanation of victory. Assuming something of the whole colouring of his personality, steeped in that, without power of analysis or criticism,

she walked along, broad-eyed, misty-eyed, avoiding pools of water and the worst mud.

Beside her, her mother with her head quite low and her feet digging into the earth, oblivious to everything, began to talk in subdued tones, remote yet distinct and grim, to herself, startling Margaret out of her reverie.

'Not going the whole distance—with the brigade—only to Grassy Point—Samuel—living there—long time—Indian Mission—long ago—one letter from Samuel—from Fort Garry—Samuel left Ireland poor as a church mouse—came to a strange shore—acquired great wealth—was going from here West, letter sayed —the first and the last we ever had from him.—Came out here ourselves—found Samuel had remained at Fort Garry short time only——'

The voice sighed much, became muffled once in shadows then droned on, distinctly, grimly again. 'He's looked for him everywhere—everywhere—spent a pot of money—long journeys everywhere—wild goose chase, everyone.—Then word comes, set down in a letter lived a long time near here—at Grassy Point—with a squaw, I'll wager.

'Whether he is there or not—whether he is alive or dead? But what good will ever come of it? We have the only right claim on the money. But where is it—and where is Samuel?' The voice grew louder, demanding, 'Shall I ever see a farthing of it. It's little he's given his true wife and children all these years. If he ever comes back again empty-handed, I'll give him plentiful fear.'

With that threat the terrible voice stopped dead.

Shocked, apprehensive, dismayed beyond measure, Margaret stared at her mother and spoke up incredulously, 'But mamma,' in great distress, 'truly you do not think it is Uncle Samuel's money papa is seeking?'

It was then the mother's turn to regard her daughter with amazement.

'What do you know about it, I'd like to know? Keep to your own business,' she commanded sharply.

Hurt, still bewildered, resentful even, in silence Margaret continued to pick her way along, avoiding pools of water and the worst mud, struggling pluckily to find for her feet high, dry clean ridges however narrow, relieved when she was able to look up, her eyes clinging as long as possible to a poplar tree holding out a golden arm, to a few early crimson leaves on another tree, bright touches that refused to be swallowed into the all enveloping fog.

Chapter XXI

At home at last, roused to the needs of her family, Elizabeth Moore plucked, cleaned and soon had in a pot, over a bed of coals in the fireplace, the prairie chickens which the boys had knocked lifeless with sticks on the way home.

Throughout a luscious meal of chicken in brown gravy, bannocks and milk, silence prevailed. Only light munchings, Tim eliciting sweet juices from a bone, faint sippings, the crackling of the fire and their mother's stern glances, expressed as best they might, as only an unfinished symphony can, the new era; deeply sensed now with Don at the head of the table.

Another fatherless era about which nothing, as usual, would ever be said. What had been said by their mother to herself not intended for the ears of anyone.

But Margaret had heard distinctly, and was dismayed by those hard echoes of sound as they had seemed, coming out of the fog so clearly, words of sorry meaning. Those hard echoes still lay in her eyes, eyes made to create pleasant harmonies only and wearing that injured look when for any reason deprived of their power. Better silence until death than that the secret should be so maltreated, that the gold thread should have for one moment even, snapping, lain broken, blackened and despoiled in the ground. Better if she had not heard her mother's queer recitation at all.

If she could consider that she had not heard it since it was not intended for her ears, and go on as before!—as much as possible as before—in that aura where she was living with Roger MacLachlin in that fusion of moods, whatever they were or however explained, which was absorbing her more and more deeply every minute.

She could forget that her mother had said anything. The symphony could remain unfinished for her as for her brothers. And there was something quite unreal about her mother's voice and words. Had she talked in actuality or had she talked as one asleep, at random and without sense?

So much about the day had been unreal quality. The scene on the river banks, the departure of the boats—a dream, everything—continuing to the present, to the house itself and its inmates, the house with miles of mist about it and around it. An unreal house, one that before their time had been the brief abode of others, now gone, and the boys, her mother, themselves shadows of souls flitting to the cold earth and resting for a moment by a poor fire to gain, if possible, a little warmth.

All so unreal and she herself so weary after the long walk, twice taken, so hard to-day; after all her stress, after having had in the last three months experiences such as never before, all deeply felt, she was now of herself initiating little inward response to all that was or had been. Within the last three months she had gone the gamut of all emotions. Now it seemed as if all had been drained out of her, all past joys, vanity, anticipation, sadness, disappointment, resentment, leaving her nothing

but the mixed mood of another, which she accepted without questioning, without understanding; yet with something of sympathy, with patience.

That was the real thing that evening; her mother, brothers, her father, her mother's monologue receded into the general unreality.

And Mrs. Denny presenting herself at the door was another unreality, looking so much indeed like a monstrous doll, her head a detachable piece bobbing about on the huge cone formed by her wide crinoline and her cloak tapering to her neck.

'Proper fog. Fair blinds you. Howsomever not las' long —never do—Howsomever I wudna come, but thinks I, they'll be lonely.'

Settling herself by the fire, her eyes beady as a doll's, too, she emitted gossipy particles.

'What think you of Mistress Smith's robe? Watered silk, no less?

'And the bonny Fanny swingin' that contraption, and no sun?

'And that Simone makin' heyes——?

'And the MacGletts from down the Red, all in good stuffs and 'atted? Time was when Barbara MacGlett wore leather from 'ead to foot. 'Arf Hindian she are—more'n 'arf. Now look at 'er—quite the lidy.

'And I mus' say if they do say as Mistress Currie was a rare beauty of a dark sort she'd break henny stay lace ever made, shakin' like a bag of jelly.

'The Chief Haccountant nor 'ees woman I never sees, though they do say as 'ow 'e never leaves the Fort, never goes to 'unt a goose let halone a buffalo, never bothers

'ees 'ead. Don't know a buffalo from an 'are, nor a wolf like as not. And 'er hall the time makin' crochet to a pattern out of a book, not workin' on skins hever. Settin' 'erself up fer quality. But that's not quality, nor the colony Governor nor them 'igh and mighty Scotch ones with all their carpets, pitchers, flowers in crocks hinside, and sich. Sich don't make real quality. Lor', my 'usband wos 'osler to the 'orse of a dook, and I knows—and I mus' say a bit of 'igh life, a proper lord or lady'd relieve the teedeum. Plain I calls it 'ere—barrin' Sir James when 'ees 'ere—proper plain.'

For some time Mrs. Denny presumed to remedy loneliness, shedding her particular gleanings from the day, much that was chaff, with little help or hindrance from her audience; until she made the announcement that Colin Currie and Fanny were to be sent to colleges in the East 'for finishing' very shortly. Then Elizabeth Moore spoke up, 'They'll be nicely educated,' stirred the bones of the fire vigorously, a couple of whitish thigh bones, and looked over at Margaret.

But splinters of flame leaping up, lighting faces, briefly, showed Margaret's pale and unheeding.

'Go on—another log,' Don was directed.

Don placed another log on the failing fire. But too wet to burn, it merely sizzled in black protest; and without candlelight the room settled back again into a gloomy cavern with the family ghosts as before, and Mistress Denny weirdest of all.

Once to be sure, about to depart, even as she floated spectrally up in her hoops, she charged the room with a spark of reality.

'The Governor at the Fort still bedfast. No sight of 'im houtside for months—and I 'ear they're 'avin' to 'ave more 'elp—in the 'ouse—as well as hout.

'Ruther furrin-lookin', I'd say, the gentleman in charge now. Never 'eard tell of 'im afore. Mettlesom I'd say. Did you see him goin' hafter the brigade——?'

'Oh,' chorused Pat and Rob, rousing from sleepiness. 'He went so fast—so fast.'

'Bit of a lark—showin' hoff—afore some young lidy I'd say. Now I must go.'

'Margaret and Donovan may see you on your way, Mistress Denny?'

'Oh, thankie, thankie. A proper fog I'll say—but it'll not las'.'

The three came out into the night. Across an invisible river faint lights showed through the parchment windows.

'They'll be dancin' I'll wager,' Don commented.

'Better if they was muddin' up their 'ouses afore a frost. Las' year they leaves them unmudded and nigh froze.'

The river road was very bad, the narrow trail which they sometimes took to Mrs. Denny's. They made their way out to the rear. Passing the potato patch Don remarked that the potatoes would rot in the ground soon if the sun did not shine and dry up the water. He spoke cheerfully, with tones in his voice unknown to Margaret, unreal tones.

They went on. Margaret brushed into a tree the leaves of which, like wet eyelashes, shed chilly tears on her hand. After this she knew they were out in the cart-track,

feeling there too, although seeing nothing, a sweep of dark air from the prairie.

Don guided them as best he could over the gutted path, sometimes taking Mrs. Denny's arm, bringing that flopping voluminous lady safely at last to the porch of her little log house where she unbolted and opened the door. A smell of mould issued and from the blank darkness within a dry, raucous voice, 'Polly wants a cracker.'

Margaret started back. How penetrating the voice! Was it the voice of one speaking from the grave?

Mrs. Denny cackled, 'Good-night, dearies—I 'ope you gets 'ome safe—it is bad—thankie—thankie, kindly—it is bad——'

It was bad. Returning, Margaret and Donovan again struggled with mud and mire and thankfulness came to her genuinely enough that she was no longer wearing her best and longest gown nor her English shoes. One hoped they were not already ruined.

She noticed, too, one patch in the sky faintly luminous, while below all was still wrapped in pagan gloom, and, looking up, tripped over a layer of branches laid across the road by previous travellers in a cart.

'Look out.' Don caught her before she fell and carried her bodily over the impromptu corduroy and set her down on the other side with more gallantry than was his custom, as a brother; adding to his strangeness and restoring the illusory quality of everything outside herself.

She watched him stalking ahead, his coat tails flying, his arms balancing, his familiar outlines lost, and wondered if it were he—while they passed supernatural grooves haunted with vague noises. And their own

buildings when they reached them were ghoulish masses hardly recognizable.

Their mother they found in darkness, huddled alone by the fire—the boys in bed—the remnant of a shredded blanket on her shoulders. A cold current struck her as they opened the door. She straightened up, thrust out large rough hands to the tepid coals lying beside a dead log, as if in final appeal, having long groped along an inclement way full of wormwood and gall.

'It's ice in the air,' she said drawing her impoverished covering about her.

'It may clear and freeze—and all the sooner the threshing,' Don said briskly, referring to the custom of threshing grain with flails on the river ice or on a frozen pond, anticipating the threshing before the reaping.

'Better a wooden floor—if we had that.' Bending she raked ashes over the few lavender coals, complaining as if in explanation of an inmost bitterness (assuaged partly by Mrs. Denny's gossip, now overcoming her again). 'The tongue of that woman plagues me—and we must have fresh fire when we might all be in our beds. Along with you now. And don't forget your prayers. You need them, God knows.'

Pricks of pain disturbed Margaret's absorption a moment, then all from outside was as before, little felt, little realized, and her absorption greatest of all when before dropping wearily into bed she said her prayers, asking heavenly comfort for them all, bereft of a beloved protector for a time. God protect papa and guard him from all the perils of the wilderness.

This and all the usual prayers, and permeating all the

request that God bless the friend, the dear friend (whose crown of bitterness, defiance and stillness, she wore as her own) who was now happily safe home again at the Fort.

Chapter XXII

DONOVAN and his mother came in from the early chores the next morning with an odour of cold, fresh air about them.

'That little jag of wood,' his mother said, 'will scarce last a fortnight—and all of his money, he sayed, your father—and his pension enough to put us in independence if rightly used.'

The wood her father had ordered already here, Margaret, performing her toilet with bluish fingers in her bedroom, thought? It was that, looking out in the sunlight, she had heard from the rear, the man who brought the wood throwing it to the ground.

At breakfast Patrick and Robert quarrelled over some wild plums which the former had put away among the hay to ripen. Patrick declared Robert had stolen them. Robert denied the charge hotly and was in the act of attacking his accuser when their mother cuffed the ears of both. 'That will serve you out.'

Don said he would go and see about helpers to cut the wheat—one thought papa had arranged for that—and about getting more wood. But knew where he could procure a quantity.

'But there's no such hurry.'

'The wheat will soon be ready—and I may as well kill two stones with one bird.'

Mamma smiled. 'As you wish, then.'

In a few minutes Don leapt down from the second storey, dressed in his suit of solid black.

'You are fresh clothed?' Mamma smiled again.

They gathered to see him take to horse, vaulting to the saddle with the movements of a big awkward boy. Once up, however, reins in one hand, whip in the other, he had quite an adult bearing and rode off in an urgent manner, master of the horse and of the house.

In a gust of wind Margaret went down to the river slopes to gather high bush cranberries. It was clear and bright and down among the trees sheltered as in a private room, sheltered from everything, from the childish bickerings. Don's appearing almost too happy, the matter of the wood, of the wheat, her mother's manner? Did one imagine that as Don leapt on the horse, mamma, with another smile, had slipped him a measure of congratulation? For what? Margaret wondered vaguely for a moment and then no more, accepting as their natural function the assistance of the trees in shutting out all such questions; with that grateful sigh with which she so frequently accepted the influence of trees, air, water and sky.

She was in the private room, among the trees, of her own thoughts. Curiously, this morning, she felt the coming of surer thoughts and of surer feelings than she had had the day before when she had felt everything as through a vapour. But to-day the atmosphere so bright, so transparent, the sky unclouded. A few gossamer tails and ravellings of clouds only, aloft in a region of cold

indigo that, curving earthward, deepened to a warm turquoise. A time of maturity. After much hot weather, the last rain over, all was drying quickly. A time of maturity, yet all so fresh and unstained. Leaves of trees on the river banks almost as green as in June, none showing that premature touch of decay (if brilliant) of the poplar tree farther away on the plains, holding out a golden arm. Neither was there by the water one scarlet leaf in sight. All were still firmly green and moist, and quivering with delight when the sun touched them. Hard berries on bushes, white or reddening, were filmed with the dew of birth. Nature's rush to accomplish her purpose in the short time allotted to her was over and fruit crisp, newborn, lay in her lap.

The high bush cranberries were in their first pinkish bloom (mamma wished them so for jelly) and the clusters so thick that they crowded into Margaret's hands. Soon she had filled her rogan, and, placing it on the slanting ground on the upper side of a tree trunk for safety, sat down on a log nearer the river, gliding swiftly by in midstream after the recent rains with the sparkle of freshly washed dewdrops. Sometimes Margaret's eyes were on this sparkling medium, sometimes they sought through high tree tops a patch of unblemished blue, more often they rested on the air itself, bearing no trace of the fog of yesterday, reduced, it seemed, to elementary light.

No, Roger MacLachlin's bitterness and defiance of yesterday were not attributable to some difficulty in the affairs of the Company. She rejected that. Neither was his mood induced by her father in any way. Her father

had treated him with his usual heartiness. Everything in that connection she had thought of and rejected. Neither could his manner have been on account of her mother. Meeting him—hearing of him only she had spoken harshly, his affairs were no concern of theirs she had said—she had addressed him in those tones which she reserved for special occasions.

His manner had nothing to do with her mother, her father, her family generally; nor with anyone outside the family. It had to do with herself. On her account alone. This conclusion from the events of yesterday held yesterday in cloudy suspension awaiting some clear intuition, found it this bright morning.

Something she had done or said, herself, or omitted to do or say.

But what?

She reviewed the slight conversations they had held —and wondered—and wondering, thought of this and that trifle with some compunction. No, she had not intended—— For a moment again that futile gnawing held her, then she threw it off, with a bright hope. He would come, to-day, doubtless, bringing them a message of papa, how he fared when he had last seen him, telling them of his own brief adventure flying over the water, down the Red and up again. She would talk to him again and all would be well.

He would come. In the meantime she could do nothing, however much discretion she might have lying about idle. He would come—soon. Suitors came—prostrated themselves in the dust.

But how hueless and rayless was Mr. Johnson com-

pared to Roger MacLachlin, whose calmness was so life-like, (she began to soar in the most positive as well as the most chaste manner) whose form when at rest had the poise of a tree. 'Koominah Koush.' 'Like a pine tree.' How well his Indian name suited him. Through him seemed to breathe in his voice the tones of the wind, the murmur of the plains. Yet how quickly he could flash into action, like a tree impelled by a sudden current—and how his deep brown eyes could glow with inward fire—with little defiant flames of fire.

Musing, indeed slightly confused, she bent over and picked a white berry from a bush near by, a snowdrop, full, round, glistening white—except for a slight earth stain which she brushed off. Gazing a long time at the tiny sphere, all at once she suddenly tossed it away and stood up rigidly, her lips parted, drawing a deep breath.

This was something other than a conclusion arrived at by eliminating all else. This was something other than intuition even. This was a fact, a discovery, arising out of the very air itself and staring her in the face. A fact as clear as noonday, as her hand before her, as manifest.

How could she have made that error? Her error. Never could she have believed it possible.

Now—it could not happen.

In a sort of delighted anguish, for her discovery at first both pleased her and hurt her, she began to walk up and down the bank, up and down, plucking at this and that, stooping and gathering more snowdrops like a mad person, paying no attention to them, crushing them and throwing them away in handfuls—pausing

and listening—looking dumbly at the trees around her —as if they might be haunted—putting both hands on her heart—beating so—staring into the air.

Into the air whence alone, after all, this discovery seemed to have come. Out of the air, clearly as the ringing of a bell. Out of the air of the world, itself.

Air of the world. Air of the world, calling of this, speaking of this, re-affirming this knowledge every second, causing her to know what she now knew beyond all shadow of doubt—putting her beyond all shadows—for all time.

Beautiful air of the world. Stretching out her arms she seemed to embrace its assurance, to draw it in, to cling to it. Immersing her soul in the happiness alone of that assurance; greatly enraptured, for a maiden who had made a bad mistake, causing much suffering to another.

A very bad mistake. Yet for a long time she stood immersed in that air, charged with all things as it is known to be, both good and bad, stretching out her arms to it and drawing in good alone, throwing it into herself with both arms. And there she might have stood for hours acting in this most abandoned fashion, if her mother had not all at once called her imperatively into the house.

She took up her basket of cranberries and hurried up the bank into the breezes, her pulses leaping, traversing quickly the perfectly level ground in front of the house with the feeling of mounting a hill (though she had never mounted a real hill), a hill, a light, airy glorious hill, from the summit of which she looked down and

saw a miniature world, from the heights of her tremendous discovery.

To know so little, yet to know so much! From little, much after all could be known, dwarfing everything else.

In the doorway Don was saying, 'He is——yet you go away feeling he—is—important. I was talking to him, one day—and he showed me a map he made, and my eye but he knows—everything. All about the fur trade everywhere, and I don't see how they can do without so important——'

'Tsh—nonsense——' His mother was hurrying into the bedroom. Timothy was lying there. 'It is only a short time that he has been here——'

'The Fort is all agog with it,' Don called after her, anxious for a hearing for his news.

'It's his wild blood——' Her mother's voice was slightly muffled in the room. 'Come now. That's better now.' She soothed Tim.

'He had wild blood,' Don shouted. 'His mother belongs to those Indians who call themselves "The People".'

'Who?' Margaret demanded, pushing Donovan with her load.

'Naught to make a fuss about. Plenty to take his place,' her mother said.

'Who?' Margaret demanded, pushing Donovan with 'What did he do?'

'He did not come back,' Don declared, turning in a pleased way to Margaret, who at the moment, however, spoiled her use as a listener by letting all her berries fall to the ground at once.

'What's this——?' Her mother came out of the room. 'Can't you gather them up—standing there like a graven image. Huh—another dirty pickle. Have I not had enough for one day?'

In desperate haste Margaret began gathering up the fruit, Don all the while urging his news on her. News was scarce enough.

'The tale is he's gone with the brigade.'

Margaret did not look up nor answer. Don was going away discouraged when Madeleine arrived with a pail full of mushrooms which she emptied out on the table. *'Maintenant—du lait—s'il vous plaît,'* swinging the empty pail before her hostess, adding in a joking way. 'Puck—as—she twan' (share with me).

Her hostess promptly took the pail and disappeared.

In the same pleased way Don gave Madeleine his news, concluding, rashly: 'It's his wild blood. He has Indian blood.'

Madeleine's fat form stiffened. 'Your father wild—too.'

'Pshaw, the man Don is talking about, Madeleine,' his mother appearing from the cellar, consoled, 'is not like your people—at all—at all.'

But Madeleine was not consoled. 'The Majeur wild——' she muttered, and her eyes still flicking rancour, she departed—without the milk.

'You go to Tim,' her mother commanded Margaret, 'eating rotten fruit—I'll go after her—that touchy—huffed if you look at her.'

She vanished, and Margaret, her berries all retrieved from the snow white floor went to Tim who had stolen

the hidden plums, eaten them and was suffering the consequences, now lying motionless and white. Bending down to him, she put a cold face against his, as cold as his and as motionless.

Chapter XXIII

It was true, the brigade had slipped away on its long voyage with an unexpected and important passenger received into its keeping at a point not far distant from the Fort.

A long voyage, eight hundred miles or more; yet the time would pass, the women at home said, with the air of those who had witnessed many such departures. Groups of boats left regularly during the time of open waters for points in the wilderness, following the ordered schedule of the orderly Company of Gentlemen Adventurers. Undoubtedly great interest centred around the departure of brigades to York Factory, touching on far-off civilizations, with the old world, the best known civilization, though so far, yet these brigades departed regularly as the others; and as in all other cases, indeed, one such would hardly have slipped from sight when (anticipation easing thus the pain of parting) thoughts and conversation directed towards its return—with interesting merchandise, too, from old lands, interesting strangers, new settlers perhaps, as well as all the crew and some of the initial passengers; among whom this time were mentioned frequently Major Moore and Roger MacLachlin, the man of mystery, an official of the Company joining a brigade in this impromptu, yet it must be confessed, dashing and dramatic manner.

The whole Fort was agog with it as Don had said,

the whole colony indeed for several days, and then the great event of the year, by far the greatest event of the year filled every eye, ear and mouth—if not every mind and heart. The great Fall Hunt. The most important event of the year, in numbers taking part, in pageantry, in results. Followers of the chase were barely home from the lesser summer hunt when plans were mooted for its big brother, the Fall Hunt and at last, one morning when everything was right and tight, wheels, harness, when guns were as clean and polished as guns could be, the migration began. One chilly dawn there issued from every nook and corner of the settlement, ox-carts, containing families, others empty, to be filled. Arrived at the appointed place on the plains, with neighing of horses, lowing of kine, screeching of axles, the great army went forth to meet another army, of buffalo, the second as extraordinary as the first.

From a short distance the Moores viewed the gathering and watched it stream out, outriders on ponies, guns gleaming, watched the horsemen and the long line of carts wind away into the distance until could be seen only a few specks of colour on the prairie monochrome, until these and the last rising of dust were lost to view, until there was nothing more to be seen, nor heard, until the last wail from the carts had died away, until there was no sound but the wind sighing through the long grass as it had sighed since time immemorial. Turning away Elizabeth Moore sighed, too, in relief.

The autumnal trek in ancestral fur and food preserves was impressive, more even to those who remained behind than to its participants. It was impossible not to

be thrilled by it, impossible not to feel the electricity in the air for days preceding the setting forth.

Long after the hunters had passed out of sight, Don was silent; and when they were safely gone the mother sighed in relief.

Pierre Collette, who might again lead the hunt, had pressed Donovan to join the Collette group of fiddles, guns, young girls and what not. The chase was more profitable than farming. Why trouble the ground? One could live as a king for the remainder of the year. And Donovan's horse, the horse of his father, a trained buffalo runner? Pierre held up his hands in amazement. It was incredible. It was to stupefy!

'Is his father not away? That is enough,' Elizabeth Moore said to Pierre. In private whipped out, 'We are not plain hunters—even if your father——' then stopped speaking. Nothing was ever said on that subject. But had they not game near at hand, fish, eggs, milk and wheat?

So Donovan did not go, though many not exclusively plain hunters joined the Fall Hunt. Agriculturists dyed in the wool, some of the gentry and necessary officials at the Fort and old pepole were the only exceptions—and the wives, sweethearts and mothers of the *voyageurs* who had gone North. Donovan did not go. His wheat had been cut by a dozen or more neighbour women—not those it seemed engaged by Major Moore, but others—but it was still unthreshed, and the ploughing he had planned (troubling the ground) barely begun.

The time passed, as the women had said in fatalistic

tones. The oaks turned a solid raspberry tint, the poplars solid gold. Other trees had crimson or cairngorm flushings. Sunsets were often burnished bronze seen through a haze. And all waited. Across the river old Jacques and Madeleine smoked in unison long quiet hours. Indoors, Louis Basson still on his back on the old sled covered with skins, made whips more industriously than when his family were around him. Julie said he was not so well, tried to restrain his industry and was more and more by his side.

Margaret often paddled over with small cheeses of her own making, with dough-nuts of her mother's, of which Louis was especially fond. Often in returning she would float in her light monoxylon, longer than was good for her complexion protected though it was by a large sunbonnet, all those red and gold autumn days. Under the sunbonnet the face was again strained, again evidenced that debating to which the solitudes of her life, its repression, its conventions, many unexplained circumstances and events subjected her.

The time would pass, she was arguing to herself now—and she need not have allowed herself to be disturbed at all, knowing what she knew. The discovery of a recent sunny day with its assurance was unaltered. Nothing could alter that. It was a fact indubitable. Often still she was excited about it, as at first. Sometimes as she floated on the water which seemed to mirror her thoughts, her excitement would be doubled and she would with her paddle ruffle the smooth surface of the water as if seeking to counteract, with a little outward foam, too exuberant feelings foaming within her.

The plain hunters were gone, the brigade was gone. It was quiet across the way, and in the house. The two boys, the noisier two, would be away at school, Tim would be with Don, ploughing. The riverside would for hours revert to pristine peace, yet in those periods of deepest calm in the neighbourhood Margaret was often far from calm.

She would be in the house alone with her mother and, hearing a rustling sound, would hurry to the door, to see a prairie chicken walking through a mat of dead leaves. Inside again she would hear another rustling. Assuredly this must be a footstep. At the door again she would perhaps see nothing, neither bird nor man, woman or child, and would be forced to conclude that a puff of wind had sent down another shower of leaves, that was all. On the stillness the ringing of the bell from the Fort would break with a dull clacking sound. Excitement again within her. Did its ringing herald the arrival of persons, of a person? Absurd. One had only to consider the hour of the day, to know that it was merely the announcement of another meal.

Who was to come? The brigade was gone, the plain hunters were gone, and neither parties expected home again for weeks. Fanny Currie and Colin had gone to school in the East to be 'nicely educated', Mr. Johnson had gone, Harry was gone; and Colin, Mr. Johnson, and Harry, had taken their problems with them, or each a different elevation of the same problem. But there was the sound of water! A boat. Margaret hastened outside once more. Only Madeleine washing clothes, as usual.

One must be sensible. It was too soon, Margaret told herself; as she stood on the clear points, her eyes fastened on a gathering of leaves drifting downstream until she could see the tiny frigate no longer, wondering would it go on down and down to——? Impossible. But might not one leaf travel far enough to meet the eyes of either her father or Roger MacLachlin?

They might be together? Knowing nothing, one could only suppose. Papa was not going far, merely to Grassy Point. After all his searching at distant parts he had found at last that his brother had been all these years not far away. What a great pity; how much papa was to be condoled. Roger MacLachlin and her father might be together, might already have conversed at length, and the injury she herself had done to the former, unwittingly, been overcome by papa's bright presence. And Koominah Koosh might have offered to assist papa in his errand, and they would return together.

It was inevitable. Again she picked up the gold thread felled by her mother, brushed off the earth clinging to it, roughly at this stage, joined the parts together and sent it on its way, a short distance, where the long search would be ended. There the travellers would await the brigade homeward bound and all return together.

Often the first idea of her father cheered her, often her last and most important discovery since the discovery of the gold thread inspired in her throbbings that she could not suppress, which every minute sound and sight stirred anew. So quiet about, yet often she was far

from calm, even the river failing her, for no longer could she draw from it that peace which she had found there as a child. The water itself moved her, as it moved. Her heart vibrated to the air itself without rhyme or reason and fluttered with every little leaf that fell.

There was no longer music from across the river, no longer vigorous dancing, but the air was replete with miniature sounds and sighs, the whispering of trees, the splashing of fish in the river, all of which seemed to have a meaning, even if no one was arriving—the sun setting on the water running with the tints of all jewels.

The Northern Lights were much more resplendent than usual—a fact with a meaning too—filling the heavens with a luminosity much remarked upon. Not only was the illumination in the North, but from the one great crown league-long sheaves of brilliance rushed across the sky, green, silver and rose. Austerely, Margaret viewed this magnificence and thrilled to the thought that it might be visible, too, to the travellers and that those silken voices might be whispering.

But no, that was very foolish.

Why all these suppositions composed of air, bubbles and light? Why not make a cold survey of facts? Her father and Koominah Koush had gone away together. They would return with the brigade. Koominah Koosh was in love with her. Proof of that she had in sufficiency. Fortunately he was a young man possessed of every moral excellence. He was wise—he was good—his heart was as the heart of the reindeer. At every angle from which she regarded him coldly as she would regard any other person, he was perfect. Perfect in

form, in mind, in soul—in his attire—in his manner. Perfect in every way.

A sample of simple, unadorned facts! And could not one be satisfied? Why forever take his words apart, why examine them endlessly? What were words? Why invent conversations without end? Why see herself over and over again, listening breathlessly to the explanation of his sudden departure? Why put herself in his presence and feel herself actually beside him when that especially was perhaps altogether wrong? Even though she felt the world, now in the falling of the leaf, more beautiful than ever before, the ragged and unkempt trees more beautiful than ever before, the stars, the moon, the sun; even though she walked in a light that had no dimensions uniting her to the universe.

There must be something wrong. She should not be feeling thus.

Chapter XXIV

In her calmer moments Margaret tried to explain this to herself somewhat in this wise. She had once been allowed to use her own judgment. She had made an important decision. That was a great advance. Without connecting this in any way with whatever movement for the emancipation of women existed in the great world, of which she knew nothing, she felt she had attained a new status, the status at least of a young lady of unusual good sense and self-command. It behoved her to maintain that status. Moreover, there had been instilled in her, as is evident enough (an apt pupil, though one of her Majesty's most distant subjects in a semi-wild colony) that strict regard for conventions which characterized the age of Victoria; quite at variance with the tempest of emotion that would sweep over her at times; particularly when she rehearsed the advent of her discovery.

All of that was quite wrong. She had a mistake to rectify and a gift to bestow. Privately she might so consider it, but whereas ordinarily, when one had a gift to bestow, one merely bestowed it, on an overwhelmed recipient 'taken completely by surprise', in this case the recipient was required on bended knee to beg for it and plead for it, and it was wrong for her to think of bestowing it, wrong to have any feeling in the matter at all until such time as the man, after considerable for-

mality, was privileged to beg, plead, beseech, crave, sue, supplicate and implore.

She should check her feelings, should—this was not so difficult—surround her gift with masses of preservative silence, and cover the whole again with a glass case. A word spoken concerning it to another, a hint of its existence, might expose it to injury. It was, true enough, a gift far above the ordinary. Its sanctity must not be jarred. It must be kept chaste and undefiled. Above all it must be kept.

She knew of no objection on the part of her parents to Koominah Koush, and Mr. Johnson and Colin Currie were out of the running, but because of the sanctity of the gift and its fragility even under sportive attack, she ought to be dumb, to give no evidence outwardly of its existence, not even the flicker of an eyelash. Best of all, restrain all emotion consequent on its conscious possession, which was so wrong. One did not quite know how—after all. After all, had she explained that?

However, she did succeed in presenting a wonderfully stoical appearance, and nothing was revealed, nothing whatever, though she watched the season's progress, the calendar of nature, as a cat watches a mouse, time becoming the essence of her existence, and every evidence of its passing, no matter how dull, a radiant promise; shrubs on the banks stripped of everything but berries, more leaves added to the dead, soggy leaves in the water, the wind whining through reed-like branches. And though the day was still in the future, her heart applauded when she saw far up in the sky long

snake-like lines of wild geese and heard them sounding their loud alarm that from their lofty point of view it was time for all northern travellers to seek warmer climes.

Though the day was still in the future! Six weeks to go and six to return were allotted the brigade, and their neighbours returned from the plains long before.

The wind was singing through the long brindling grass with a cold, harsh sibilance, and an autumnal atmosphere of menace hung over the plains—more and more they seemed to crouch ready to spring—when the first group of hunters straggled in, those who had filled their carts first arriving first, reporting a most successful chase, in numbers, in enjoyment, in results.

The caravan, augmented along the way, numbered when complete two thousand souls, and was at least three miles long. At Grey Mound they had settled into camp, and after several days' feasting and amusement, the code governing the hunt having been drawn up, the leaders elected, one of whom was the narrator, Pierre Collette, the men had set out to meet the buffalo, an immense herd having been sighted.

The first day eight hundred buffalo had been killed. *Le bon Dieu* had been good. It was almost as in the time of our fathers.

And every day more carts arriving, filled to overflowing, streaked with congealed blood, confirmed the sanguine tales of Pierre—who gave the Moores a generous portion of his share of the spoils.

That was better than being a party to the killing, Elizabeth Moore claimed, thanking him.

Mais, non, non! What Don had missed in the glory of the hunt—took much telling, of individual prowess, of luck in games of chance, of pony races, of all such exciting preliminaries to the slaughter—never forgetting the slaughter, the magnitude of the slaughter.

It was enough. Pierre and his family could now rest on their laurels, which they did in a fashion, though dancing, singing, arguing loudly, gesticulating much, resting at least in that they spent many an idle hour betting on the exact day and hour of the return of the York boats; with luxuries which they could now well afford, with friends and relatives.

It was nearing the end of the allotted time. The brigade must come soon now, or never. Don brought in a last boatload of fish from the weir upstream. These would be the last he could obtain in that manner. The water would soon freeze, to-day, to-night. Madeleine sat out all that night in a boat fishing with a line. In the morning there was thin ice on the edge of the river. At noon big flakes of snow wheeled above in the sunlight as if looking for a suitable place to drop, undecided whether to fall or not. Was the higher altitude more in keeping with their purity? In the end, with nothing to support them, they winged down, flecking the ground in scattered patterns.

All day long Margaret went about, pale and inwardly agitated, her hopes pale snowflakes dancing on high, awaiting their hour of descending loveliness.

Since early morning there had been rumours. Late in the afternoon they knew that the brigade would arrive that night.

In the first darkness a crowd of people, huddled near the landing outside the Fort, straining their eyes along the almost invisible waters, straining their ears, emitted a common white breath.

Sounds of oars falling in unison on the water, hardly more than heavy respirations in the distance, were caught and answered with deeper respirations, with gleeful exclamations. Muffled shouting and a vast creaking of oars brought forth loud calls and a chorus of glee from the watchers, long before the weird bulky shapes rounding the point, came into full view. Then, as one by one the boats drew in with heavy loads, a ghostly fleet by torchlight, filmed with snow and ice, each in turn was given a deafening welcome. Then one jubilant friend after another met one passenger after another leaving a cramped position in a boat, and one loudly rejoicing family after another received into its bosom its weary *voyageurs*.

The Moores examined intently everyone who stepped off the boats and waited while a part of the goods was unloaded, opulent packages of silks, of velvets, of preserved viands, hampers of tea, kegs of nails, cases of axes, 'pieces' of tobacco; then left, making their way through the cheers of the crowd, leaping from throat to throat, the beginning merely of the wild enthusiasm, flourishing of torches, consumption of liquor, fire without and fire within, which always greeted the return of a brigade.

But at last having no part in any of this they went out from it into the unlighted spaces of their homeward journey, meeting a chill wind that brought cold tears to

their eyes, tears wrung from cold and disappointed hearts they might have been. For Major Moore had not come, nor Roger MacLachlin.

Chapter XXV.

LATE that same night swarthy Antoine Basson, the guide, came to tell them of *'un voyage—très difficile.* Break ice all time. Cars broke plenty—Majeur not at Indian village, like he say. No *personne. Les sauvages* all gone—hunt. Nice *cabanes,* leetle *champs*—empty—*beaucoup*—Majeur not in dat place. I look all over dat place.

'Mais—not far—*probablement*——' he consoled, 'not far, I guess—*accompagne les autres. Il retourne* soon—soon—*riviere* make ice, hard—*sauf et sain*—all right.'

'Non, non,' Antoine gestured forcibly in reply to Margaret's faint enquiry. Monsieur MacLachlin not *retourne long temp*—go far—vary far. He make map—and he go dat place—far North—at Arctic.'

Don's eyes lighted with a convincing memory. 'He showed me——' he stammered excitedly, 'a map he made—on birch rind.'

'Oui, oui. He make good map. Roger know dat countree—*mais monsieur le* Majeur home soon. I know dat.'

Repeatedly Antoine assured them of this. But in spite of his hearty affirmations all still looked quite blank; and one member of the family petrified with the other half of the news.

The river would freeze solid to-night. Antoine pro-

phesied in parting, cheerfully. The Major would then return easily by dog sled.

Margaret lay awake long hours. Why could Roger MacLachlin not come too, when there was ice in the rivers? Early in the morning she heard an axe ringing on wood as it rings in hard frost. She left her bed, dressed and went out. Her mother was milking. The milk was singing into the bucket and hot steam rose from it. The fish on the racks were firm as boards. The river was a winding avenue of glass, shining clear in the morning sun.

At breakfast it occurred to her that her mother had not slept at all. Her eyes were so brittle bright.

But her father could come easily by dog sled over the ice—when it was thick enough—not long in this temperature. And would not Koominah Koush come too?

She went out into the sun again, and again it brought optimism. Surmises hanging over her all the dark night became strong exhilarating presumptions. They were together as she had thought before. Antoine knew little. He merely guessed. Roger was assisting papa—once more befriending the family. They would return together when the ice was hard enough.

Before many days it was firm as a rock, hard and thick enough to bear any weight; and morning, noon and night the Moore family looked along the fine smooth road—in vain.

'He wait for snow,' Antoine suggested.

Astonishing that they had not thought of that! Under the circumstances, the travellers having doubtless gone into the interior, snow would be a necessity. In no other

way could travel by dog sled out to the frozen waters be accomplished. And one must, in this matter, accept Antoine's statement, since so palpable a fact had not occurred to anyone of themselves. Antoine had had great experience. To move from one place to another over the land at this time of year snow was indispensable.

One must wait for snow.

The first light sprinkling had long since disappeared, if it would have served. But it was cold 'below cipher' every morning, Don said. On the cart-track on which few were travelling in any fashion, the mud had fastened into hard perverse ruts. It was cold, but for days the sky was clear, a clear severe blue without a cloud. For days, scrutinizing the sky, Margaret saw in the upper reaches only a few white pencilled lines and jagged hieroglyphics that promised little. Expert readers of all such handwriting, the most skilful weather prophets in the neighbourhood saw only a period of settled, bright cold weather ahead.

For Don it was an advantage. The wheat was threshed on a pond of ice covered with tarpaulin, in a clear, sunny, freezing atmosphere, the helpers, all men and boys this time, using their flails with vigour, their long hair waving backwards and forwards. Patrick, Robert and Timothy without flails imitated their movements, letting their hair fall over their faces and tossing it back again.

The wheat was threshed at last. And a good wind was of great assistance in blowing the chaff away as they sieved the mixture from the pond. But when the work was finally completed and Don was satisfied with the

quantity of good clean grain, one could release one's longing for snow with a clear conscience, could pray for it; and could lift one's heart in thanksgiving when one's prayers were answered.

For *le couvert du bon Dieu* came soon after the threshing. So *à propos*. Huge dark clouds appeared in the sky, the next day even, and moving to a suitable position over the colony, distributed their pure contents, at first playfully, scattering large, festive flakes, later discharging even white streams steadily for hours, with great earnestness, blessing the earth, quite as Margaret had asked to have it blessed.

Never in all her seventeen winters had she found snow so acceptable. Never had she thought of it in so many ways. It was the milk of Divine kindness. It was manna from Heaven. It was a flock of white angels themselves, covering with their wings the bare trees, the hard ground.

She rejoiced, the whole family rejoiced. Travel by dog sled would be swift and easy over softly padded earth and ice; and the first morning after the beautiful deluge from on high Patrick and Robert set out with Luke and another dog in harness on a sled for school for the first time that season. Margaret went out to hear their hurrahs in starting, to listen until these had died in the distance, to look long into the transformed prairie, to smile at those who passed by on foot, all with expressions of content, to take the snow up in her hands and examine it, its clear crystals all the same, all six-pointed, yet all different, full of variety, full of light and colour—the world covered with a bed of white flowers, glinting all hues of the rainbow.

Once more the family watched the river road, now become so animated. Clothed in sealskin from head to foot, the rector early went by setting out on a long journey in a handsome parchment carriole drawn by four dogs with beaded saddle cloths, neatly fitting harness and little bells. Behind ran the driver shouting *'Avant—avant,'* flourishing a long whip, sometimes standing on the projecting board at the rear of the carriole.

Soon the rivers became the main thoroughfares, the main routes of pleasure and business for months; with a new power, no longer subtle, practical rather and cheerful. Human voices were always rising from below, barking of dogs, cracking of whips. There one saw the world go by, women and girls in blue, red or yellow petticoats, men in gaily girded capotes, on foot, on horse, on ox-sled, the few aristocrats in horse carrioles. Every bright morning now the colony governor, so far recovered from his invalidism, took an airing with his family, all wrapped in rich peltries, on the rivers, in a stately blue carriole matching in colour the uniform of the coachman on a high seat at the rear.

Often Margaret, her mother and brothers, watched the world go by, for a long time watched the white highway for a particular purpose with no apparent dwindling of interest. A strange sled would round the first point. Their hearts would leap. A voice would be heard. But never a voice expected.

At last the day came (Margaret did not at first notice the omission) when Antoine, who had been steadily prophesying, ceased to prophesy, when he ceased to visit them. She did not think of it until one day she realized

that she alone was inspecting the route of travel, that neither her brothers nor her mother were beside her; when she walked slowly back into the house to see her mother there sitting by the fire looking at the daguerreotype on the mantel and talking to herself.

How difficult it was for mamma to bear the crushing burden of loneliness, the crushing burden of loneliness! Yet papa must return soon. He would return. How sure he had been of winning this time! He had been so confident. That memory of his splendid hopefulness could not be erased. And when he returned Roger MacLachlin would return.

Hope still lived and drew a few more breaths, until that intensely cold afternoon when the sun was setting. Margaret left the house and took up her usual position on the river bank, and was standing sentinel-like, it must be confessed, rather than expectant, guarding her hope rather than hoping, when a joyous cry rang out from an approaching sled. She gasped. A form rose up in the sled clothed in a brilliant red capote, above which appeared a huge, white stock tightly adjusted. With one hand the driver flicked against a long plaid trousered leg a riding whip, and with the other waved a high, glossy hat which he had removed from dark hair closely cropped. Stunned though she was, Margaret waved in return.

Enraptured at having secured her attention, rushing ahead, shouting to his dogs, gesticulating wildly the new arrival swung his sled close into the bank beside her and in a moment she was looking down into the face of Harry!

In a terrible revulsion of feeling she turned and fled over the chill, violet snow. The sunlight had passed away, the cold was withering, and the snow that had been so beautiful had the pallor of death.

Chapter XXVI

MARGARET hurried into the house where it was warm, where it was more than warm, where winter's coldness was completely expelled, where the climate of the equator prevailed. Long ago provision had been made for just such a climate within these narrow confines. Early in the autumn Don had 'muddied' well the walls outside. Later, he had banked them up with snow evenly. Within, fur rugs padded the floor, and into every slightest crack around the windows in the walls, in corners along the floor had been inserted with a knife scraps of cloth and skin. Everything that an exact knowledge of cold and all its idiosyncracies suggested had been done to make this one spot frost-proof. Early in autumn, too, Don had procured a quantity of wood large as the house itself; and when Margaret entered, the heat produced by a roaring fire in the Carron stove and another in the fireplace, a terrific contrast to the temperature without, struck her full in the face; but did not penetrate to her heart.

Rather she felt something was gone utterly from her —not there to be warmed by any heat however great, within herself or without. Her magic picture. Two men toiling onward in close companionship advancing towards the settlement. That picture was gone. It had been losing form throughout the days she had watched alone, imperceptibly, then one moment had flashed back

again, fiercely warming her heart, scorching it; the next mocking it to the frigidity of the poles.

It had been too cruel a travesty. Never had Harry come to her notice so painfully as on this last occasion when so utterly changed, so grand, his limp tails of hair cut off, his ornate regalia, his manner of flicking his whip, of lifting his hat, the best sporting manner of other young half-breeds of the settlement. Just for one moment she had taken him for Koominah Koush.

Now she was incapable of another inspiration. No soul-stirring thought of any kind came to her, and no one brought any information from without. Antoine no longer visited them. He was lying like a log in the house, intoxicated, Don said. How unreliable he was after all. For long he had held out false hopes knowing they were false, probably not knowing at all what he said. How foolish was his suggestion that papa would wait for snow when at that time there might easily have been snow farther north where the travellers were, sufficient at least for them to commence their journey homeward.

The truth was, she saw now, that Antoine knew nothing of her father's route, nor of Roger MacLachlin's. He merely guessed. Neither did her mother know anything of her father's route, and little of his purpose. She herself knew nothing of the routes of either, and little of their purposes—except that they were good. The gold thread was still gold, even though it might be that her father, being his rightful heir, sought his brother because he wished so much to obtain money for mamma. That was as it should be. Words, parts of speeches

from long ago, not otherwise explained, confirmed this idea. One was beginning to see. However, his purpose was good. And Roger MacLachlin's purpose in absenting himself was good, whatever it was. She did not know and she had no reliable means of information, none whatever.

As the winter advanced the family had less and less intercourse with outsiders. During the Christmas and New Year season their neighbours were deeply engrossed in celebrations, on a larger scale than ever, consuming more and more liquor. Antoine was not the only one thus engaged and shortly incapacitated. For weeks no one set foot in the house, except Angus Currie, hastening in with a gift of beef on Christmas Eve, both man and beef glistening with frost, hastening in and hastening out, in parting urging mamma to 'gie us a call—gie us a call, wiman'—and while mamma promised, when he had gone she declared harshly that she would visit no one unless she went in a carriole. And although they had a horse they had no carriole.

Angus Currie was their only visitor for a long time, and they themselves visited nowhere. They did not go carrioling when all the world was carrioling. Don alone went to the Fort and returned alone, with little news—except of those strangers, 'Canadians' he called them, who had arrived during the summer, one of whom had actually erected a building on the plains outside the Fort! An extraordinary spot to choose for a building site. One built on the river banks. The fact of this strange erection had given rise to those extravagant stories of newcomers and of advances shortly to be

made, stories which Don brought home, but to which neither mamma nor herself paid any attention. Always these wild stories, little else, no real information at all. No one at the Fort apparently spoke of Roger MacLachlin. No one mentioned his name—at least Don brought no word of him and Margaret would not ask. She would ask no one.

At church, for they went to church, to be sure, on foot over the snow, no longer beautiful, no longer beds of flowers, no longer *le couvert du bon Dieu,* rather a dreary waste of cold unfeeling marble, no one dropped a hint. She listened and waited in the vestibule, in parting, for a chance word—a chance word might tell much. But she heard nothing. Few spoke to them. Mamma addressed few and those few with a haughtiness that discouraged further advances.

There was no way, it seemed, in which Margaret could learn anything of the one in particular of whom she wished so much to know. Few of their friends spoke to them even at church. Standing in the vestibule those few moments before going out, it seemed to Margaret as if a great void surrounded them. Outside again, the void surrounded and grew and on that void, from which all the angels of happy fancy had fled, shadowy demons of all kinds rushed in.

Could it be that she would never see Koominah Koush again? How cold was the wind in one's face, tolling a requiem! Had he indeed left the colony forever, had he gone to his former place of residence? Could it be that her terrible mistake had driven him away forever? How sensitive were those of Indian

blood! Mamma had spoken of it, but until that day Madeleine had gone away huffed Margaret had not realized it, had not thought of it. Then it had come home to her at the moment of her discovery; and now again. How sharp was the wind! She wiped away a tear. How much better it would have been if she had had 'a little Indian in her'!

As it was, they were not a standard family and never would be. The gold thread might be still a gold thread, might even yet bring them an uncle, but an uncle, alas, of 'pure transatlantic blood'. The gold thread was doing what it could, weaving a pattern, perhaps, for the family life, but certainly not the standard pattern of the colony. It had gathered—and outlined—many patterns, had begun a quilt, not a conventional 'log-cabin' quilt, for instance, but a crazy quilt, with a purple patch or two, if one accepted rumours of papa—which one did not accept whatever they were.

They were not a standard family, they lived to themselves, the void increased about them daily, and on the void rushed suspicions not so easily rejected as vague rumours. Like a streak of lightning in the dark void was the terrible thought that in this period came to her. Had her father at last gone away willingly, not so much because of eagerness to follow up an excellent trace of his brother as because he did not wish to remain at home at all—because—because—mamma had finally, after he had refused the position at the Fort, not wished him to remain.

Long before he had left had there been a coolness between them greater than ever before?

But no, how could one think of that? Banish that demon. Especially when at home she saw her mother take up her position by the fire again and talk to herself in that manner of infinite dolour, digging more deeply and still more deeply into herself, her loneliness.

That was wrong. One could not think that of mamma, nor of papa. Nothing, after all, could take away from her her esteem of her father—and nothing, nothing could take away from her discovery concerning Koominah Koush—even should he never return. These things remained, however great the void, though the skies fell and she were dyed in blue.

And the void did grow; no word of Koominah Koush, nor of her father, no explanation, nothing, a great void, a stage cleared of human or higher counsel on which this and that and what not skeleton might at any moment stalk forth and show its bones, a distaste for the narrow confines where one spent the winter days and long evenings; frozen fish always by the stove in the process of thawing for the dogs, the constant odour of wet fur garments drying, the fetid air, the intense heat at time, for one dared not open a door and the windows were all nailed down. A suffocating spot! How keep preserved here in its own clear rarified atmosphere, one's purified solution of a life? What availed being 'The Lily of Fort Garry' if no one visited them? And what availed a drawing-room education without a drawing-room?

If one could leave it all, if one could move in some other interior, if one could come in contact with people and bear something!

An inspiration at last, or something closely resembling an inspiration, perhaps the working of some far ferment, outside in the great world, unknown to her. She would leave this interior. She would leave it. There were others in the colony.

Secretly, but with much more courage than when she had first introduced the subject to her mother, asserting in this way perhaps something of her new status, she wrote a letter to Simone—who had a good opinion of her, in general.

Yet she was merely asking for advice. Did Simone think it at all possible for her to obtain a position in Mistress Toll's Academy? She could teach some of the simpler subjects—sewing, embroidery. She could teach geography. She had learned the use of the globe.

After a night during which her determination grew, in the morning she gave the letter to Donovan, who was going to the Fort and was delighted to carry the missive to Simone.

During his absence visions of relief bloomed in Margaret and she had a rose's period of great expectation—less. Don soon returned with the reply, after a few hours. The rose did not live out its natural life; in full bloom was frozen.

Simone regretted that she was unable to help. She felt flattered but regretted that she had no influence with Mistress Toll at all. She was sorry, for she believed Margaret could occupy such a post as she had described. She was confident Margaret could teach geography, having learned the use of the globe. Indeed, in fancy she saw Margaret as Atlas bearing the globe on her

shoulders with ease, balancing it perfectly. But unfortunately she could not assist in the matter. Perhaps in some other way Margaret might make use of her—having learned the use of the globe and all its inhabitants.

'Make use of her—make use of her,' Margaret repeated—in a stunned way, dropping the letter to her lap. What did Simone mean? For the first time in her knowledge of Simone, Margaret detected a claw in Simone's velvety manner. 'Make use of her—make use of her?'

Frost and blankness again, loneliness, inexperience, futilities, ignorance, starkness of soul—the stage where more and more skeletons stalked forth and showed their bones; where were those hollow winds on which the remnant of hope was dancing towards death?

Chapter XXVII

HER mother had scrubbed the floor. Water froze near the walls before she could take it up with her cloth. She set big fires in the stove and in the fireplace. The atmosphere was lethal. Margaret turned to a window pane from which the frost was thawing with the heat, rubbed a portion clear and looked out on a view which had not changed by one crystal in a month, and stood there as if hypnotized by that unvarying view of hardened ivory snow; she looked very pale. Mrs. Denny had said seeing Margaret at church, 'she is fallin' into a melancholy—for her father, like as not.'

Darkness came on as she looked out, though the January days were growing longer, and the moon glimmered through branches of trees, laden with snow. Don came in flourishing a journal of a sort in his hand, waving it under his mother's eyes.

'Look—look—didn't I tell you—didn't I tell you?' he jubilated. A few days before he had announced that a couple of Canadians, strangers from the East, would shortly issue a 'printed paper'. The machinery had been installed, he had claimed, in a building not far from the Fort. His mother had refused to believe. But he had seen it. And he held in his hand something that was undoubtedly a journal of a sort. From Ireland they had received at different times a paper, much larger than this——

'Hurrah—hurrah,' Don chirruped, leaping about and thrusting the 'journal of a sort' in Margaret's face, after brushing his mother with it. 'Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you?'

How could he be so buoyed by so upsetting an innovation, Margaret thought wanly, pushing the paper from her in silence.

'Listen—listen.' Sitting down on the bench near the window, throned in highest bliss, he began to read in deafening tones.

'Mrs. Currie who has been ill for sometime is able to join the family circle once more. Her many friends will be pleased to hear of her recovery.'

'Now what do you think of that?' Don shouted. 'Didn't I tell you?'

That was indeed so. Mistress Currie had been ill and had recovered! Margaret was faintly surprised, and her mother stood at attention.

Don continued triumphantly:

'In the fire that consumed the house of John Rolland he suffered more serious burns than was at first supposed. He now lies in a critical condition at the home of Charles Porter where he is receiving every attention.'

That was also true. That could be verified.

'Give me that—that——' his mother stammered, going over to Donovan—'let me see——'

'Wait—wait,' he begged, thundering on.

'James Pounder who arrived with the Northern express tells of having seen in the vicinity of Crash Lake, early in autumn, a congregation of buffalo, twenty-six miles long and over two miles broad.'

Margaret had heard of that before, and began to understand. The object of this journal, or whatever one might call it, was to make a collection of well-known facts and print them on one sheet.

But to this very point, oddly, her mother objected. 'That is not necessary,' she said, 'if it be there. We knew all that. If that is all you can read from that—whatever it is you have——'

But Don persisted, his voice trembling now, once or twice almost choking.

'After threshing his wheat Donovan Moore has a supply of grain, we are informed on good authority, surpassing both in quality and quantity to the acreage any wheat produced in this colony. Mr. Moore is to be congratulated on the success of his first efforts in this direction.'

'*That is not there?*' his mother's voice boomed out.

'See for yourself. See for yourself.' Don said in broken tones, pushing the paper under her eyes as he furtively wiped his own eyes with the back of his hand.

His mother perused the item slowly, quite slowly. Finished, let the paper fall to her lap, ejaculating in an awed tone, 'Well—well——!'

'Did I not tell you. Did I not tell you?' Don took up the paper and began to read an article criticizing the Hudson Bay Company, accusing that august body of monopolizing the fur trade, of hindering settlement, of obstructing with high freight charges all individual enterprise.

With the exception of the language, it might have

been some of the people in the settlement haranguing. Margaret had heard all that before.

The journal indeed was inspired. It recorded without a mistake things that had actually happened, which everyone knew, and, not only that, it mirrored in its own way, yet with precision, the opinions of others.

Her mother and Don entered on a discussion of the criticism of the Company.

'That is not necessary.'

'I think it is right. Mr. Currie says so.'

'Best leave things as they are.'

'But they are not going to be as they are.'

In their absorption in their argument Margaret, her first fragile interest strengthened, took up the printed novelty, and herself began to read.

'At no time in the world's history,' her eyes lighted on this, 'has there been a braver man than Sir John Franklin. No more daring projects have ever been conceived than those conceived by him. His valiant attempts, the third and last ending in tragedy, to find the northern route which he believed existed through churning seas and packs of polar ice between the Atlantic and the Pacific ocean have no parallel in history.

'Second only to him in courage are those men, a great number, who, withdrawing from the world, have gone forth to those barren regions to unravel the mystery of the missing ships, of the fate of Sir John and those glorious adventurers who perished with him.

'Something has been learned of Sir John's last days from relics found, from guns, telescopes and compasses discovered by natives; most of all from the document

discovered in a cairn on the west coast of King William's Island, corroborating the worst suspected.

'But the high prompting to follow the great explorer's wanderings in the hope of still further information is still sending many brave men in the steps of those gone before. It is now our proud privilege to record the most recent departure on this noble mission, that of Roger MacLachlin. We are informed on the best authority that the addition of this young man to the McWare party will be the greatest encouragement. For some time he had been urged to join this most recent expedition and the joy of having him reach them, news of which arrived some time since, can only be imagined.

'No other person of our knowledge has better qualifications for the undertaking. Though still young, Mr. MacLachlin has already travelled extensively in the Far North for the Company in whose service three generations of MacLachlins have been. He is acquainted we are told with those frozen regions, their inhabitants and their language as no other man of his health, age and spirit, and as a consequence of this experience and of much study and reading, has made a map which undoubtedly the party will use with greatest confidence.

'Mr. MacLachlin is a gentleman of fine presence and of good education, and there is something of compelling grandeur in this act of his, involving as it does the sacrifice of so much ordinarily deemed most desirable. We refer both to the severing of most intimate ties and to the renunciation of the delights of a refined civilization in which Mr. MacLachlin might have shared so abun-

dantly had he accepted the highly lucrative and important post in the head office of the Hudson Bay Company in England, which post had been offered him repeatedly.'

Thus the account ended.

Knowledge! Knowledge! She had longed for knowledge—prayed for it. She let the paper drop to her lap and lifted up eyes enkindled as never before. 'Proud privilege—compelling grandeur—joy at having reached them—no person better qualified—noble mission——'

How marvellous! How wonderful!

In black and white. In a journal which recorded absolute verities.

'Noble mission!' And she had not known. Oh, how noble a mission!

The last time she had seen him. It flashed on her now, the day of the departure of the brigade. He had been standing aside from the people—and the light in his face—she saw it now again with great clarity—was the light of one breathing in a finer medium than those around him—the light of one dedicated.

At that moment he had made the decision.

It was plain now. It was plain now. She had not understood before. He had given himself to an enterprise of more signal importance than any she had dreamed of—a loftier enterprise than papa's even—meaning more to the world in general—much more.

Over and over again she read the account.

Roger MacLachlin would take his place among famed explorers of the ages. He would return successful, having won some precious facts for the use of mankind.

He would return. He would return. He would be acclaimed by all——

In a state of soul-happiness that knew no bounds, she sat the remainder of the evening looking into the fire, seeing there two gold threads at times, but always one much stronger and brighter than the other, inspired as it was by written testimony. The greater part of the time she saw one fine new gold thread alone, fire proof, frost proof, making one spiral ascent after another through a selected medium, touching reality at its utmost rim, touching gaunt skeletons—not at all, swerving away and up from all this and from the dying embers where lay the other thread, to that dazzling peak where, poised like a star, was Roger MacLachlin shining with the undying fire of heroes and of love for her.

Chapter XXVIII

THE first issue of the newspaper was the beginning of a new era, for others doubtless as well as for Margaret, but to none could it have been greater. No one on whom burst for the first time the might of electricity, no astronomer sighting by chance a new planet in the sky, no thirsty wanderers in a desert stumbling in the night on an oasis could have been more overjoyed than Margaret was when, in a wretched mood, 'falling into a melancholy,' she read those few paragraphs in the first newspaper. The words, the letters, the type like warm liquid magic coursed through her, changing completely the content of her mind, giving her a supreme vision and a supreme hope; supporting her steadily throughout the keenest tests of a long, cold winter.

The outside world had long since changed its shape as well as its colour. The prairie was a great white sea, with areas as smooth as paper, with league-long swells, with waves as high as the house. A great white sea covering everything. A few trees only, not altogether drowned, held out their topmost twigs as if seeking help from complete submersion. The slopes of the river had lost their former contours, rounding, bulging, beetling sharply to the path of travel below, often narrowed to two single ruts in the deep snow or to a single man track. Snow, too, covered the tops of houses, rose everywhere to the window-sills, whether by accident or de-

sign, frequently barricaded doors, and made barnyard enclosures one with the plains.

The thatched roof of the Collettes' rude nest gathered so much *couvert du bon Dieu* that it sank to a cave. The inmates at last became so alarmed that one day all the women and children were sent over to the Moores in a body, while the men reinforced the roof and installed at the same time a parchment window in place of the one with which a famished dog had ended a long fast.

The visitors themselves were very hungry. It was incredible. Not long since their dwellings had been bursting with sustenance, not long since they had been feasting on the best viands that could be bought, on the best liquors. Now they ate quantities of the plainest food placed before them as if verging on starvation; which was the truth.

How great was the distress among these erstwhile celebrants was soon brought to the attention of others and at different times thereafter collections of food and clothing were made for them throughout the settlement; and again and again were despatched across the river stews of fish, of rabbit kidneys, of acorns and again and again cakes of frozen milk from the Moores.

A slight exercise for that sympathy which blossomed in Margaret as never before; the need of one's neighbours exciting greater pity than ever before, even though it made an utter lack of foresight so manifest. A slight expression of something so vast in her.

Strange that mamma was not likewise happy in those neighbourly acts, not happy in doing anything at all. It was brought painfully to one's notice indeed that as the

season advanced and as the actual ice, one might say, which separated mamma and papa grew in thickness, so her suffering grew. Often for hours she would be sunk in that dullness through which now and again a sharp command alone would be thrust. It was a relief when she would resume a more lengthy, if scolding command, when she would talk at all. A great relief when Sunday came for then she would pay some attention to her person, would change her gown and arrange her hair which she was neglecting so badly (that in itself alarming), when she would brush it so that it shone again. On that day as well she would correct Margaret's deportment and the table manners of all, would show some consideration for matters other than food or clothing—on which alone she made pronouncement so stern during the week.

The Sabbath was the best day. They would all go to church together, clean and clad in their best. Then one would listen to the agreeable voice of the rector, and take part in an agreeable ritual, and if one did not always understand the sermon, it, at least, and the warmth of the church, induced in one a mood of peace that fused well with reflections one wished to have.

One hoped that mamma received some comfort. It was difficult to judge. There was on the Sabbath the interest described, but through the week she would revert to indifference. Once when the rector called she roused, upheld her dignity and was in a measure entertaining, telling of her girlhood, of days spent in the beautiful home of her aunt (never before had one heard of the beautiful home nor of the aunt), of how her aunt

had brought her forth one day to 'the company of gentry' assembled in the drawing-room, announcing, 'Elizabeth plays finely on the harp,' and of how she had performed to the admiration of all present.

Again with that exalted touch of weariness which was so becoming, mamma had related how on arriving in this country, a bride with her husband, they had lived in 'luxurious quarters at the Fort'. How little she had known of the food and customs of this strange world. Papa had come in one day munching a piece of pemmican and mamma had said, holding up her hands in horror, 'I wouldn't eat that mortar, dear.'

How papa had laughed—and laughed.

Mamma was quite enlivened by this memory, an actual happening, and one was pleased, too, at the pretty story of a wealthy aunt, which—— Yet—how did one know? And if mamma's cultivated manner could be induced by any means!

But visitors came rarely, Mistress Denny at long intervals with quite a cheerful showing of news—except on the last occasion, the day of an appalling blizzard. Traffic on the river had all but ceased. One man with a shawl over his head went by clapping his hands, another in wolf skins lying at full length on a sled sped by like lightning urging on his dogs. After that, all was a blur to Margaret and Timothy peering out of the small space they had breathed on in the window pane, until they glimpsed Mrs. Denny advancing to the door, boring through the storm.

She came to relieve her mind of a disaster it seemed.

'I los' my bird—froze to death. 'Ad 'er these twelve

months from Beller, 'Arry's mother, that is, who 'ad 'er from a man name of Paul Kerr, father of 'Arry she tells me now—never 'erd tell of 'im afore—went hoff and leaved 'er—never seed 'im since afore 'Arry was born. Right old that bird—but good company fer me—never thought 'er was goin' to die—was proper fond of 'er—'ad to bury 'er right out in the snow.'

Not only was mamma not cheered by this woeful tale which Mistress Denny made so much more woeful than was needed, but after her departure mamma had that metal-white look that was so frightening.

'What is it so distresses you, mamma?' Margaret enquired.

Her mother was grinding wheat with the quern in the old-fashioned way, as she still sometimes did, although it was unnecessary since Don could take the wheat on the horse to the mill. When Margaret spoke, she turned towards her with such a look of destiny in her eyes that Margaret all at once leapt to a dreadful suspicion.

'Truly, mamma—you do not think—you do not think,' Margaret's lips quivered, 'that papa is dead?'

'Dead—or not dead,' the words were ground out slowly as from the stones themselves, 'we shall never see him again.'

'Dead—or——' Margaret began—but could not repeat words, so harshly stressed. 'You are quite mistaken, mamma. He will return, I know,' she declared positively.

No reply but the dismal grinding, sufficient to crush—what was it mamma thought of papa?

Better almost that he were dead, that he had laid down his life for his brother, beaten in the quest, that the snow had already drawn a pure white sheet over him, than that her mother have the thought of him she had and feel so——?

It was something other than despair, than suspicion. In the depths of her mood was something of tragic contrition? Mysterious, baffling.

'Papa may come back rich,' Margaret said with a forced laugh.

Still no answer, except a harder, cracked grating of stone on stone.

'Do you think, mamma, that this would make duffles for Tim?'

'Bring it here—let me see—what is it?'

'A piece of blanket,' holding it up.

'It is very thin. You might double it.'

A lengthy discussion followed.

One progressed on such subjects alone.

Chapter XXIX

AGAIN the newspaper recorded a happening not previously known to Margaret; the marriage of Simone Laflamme and Henry Kerr. An extremely brief notice.

Simone married? 'And who might Henry Kerr be?'

'Harry,' Don informed her without emotion.

'Harry! Harry! You must be mistaken.'

'Is that not his name? I am not mistaken. I have known all about it for long.'

'You have? It is difficult—to believe.'

Since she had last seen Harry on the sled Margaret had been trying to excuse the error she had made then. He had been so transformed, his long hair shorn, his fine clothes, the dawn of white blood so noticeable in his face—and there was no doubt about his eyes—yet she was not prepared for this.

'Ate four dogs this winter already,' Don said. 'All dog.'

That appetite continuing, unabated! The unforgivable sin. Simone married to him. More and more difficult to believe——

Never, it seemed, did disillusioning influences so bear down on a determination to believe only the best, since the anointing anew of that determination by the supreme vision and the supreme hope.

A still later issue of the new journal contained a minute description of the sufferings and horrors endured

by Sir John Franklin and his companions in his second attempt to find the North-West passage. 'Weak and starving, they had crawled for miles over the ice, subsisting alone on *tripe de roche;* and, having lost all their equipment, were forced to cross a torrential river on a make-shift raft.'

And some had gone out of their minds and some had died!

Could it be so terrible?

Margaret had thought of the expedition which Roger MacLachlin had joined trustfully, yet vaguely. The ways of the great were invulnerable. Roger MacLachlin was great—and invulnerable.

But a gruesome tale, this, in the paper, the agony of body and soul, the final prostration of many previous explorers so described, the grim catalogue of similar expeditions which had failed, the death list, those from whom no message had ever been received, whose 'bones undoubtedly lay scattered on Arctic ice.'

Was this a preparation for the inevitable?

Yet the last few years, she knew, great improvements had been made in travelling and there was regular and certain contact with the remotest parts. Regularly winter dog expresses left near posts of the Company connecting with most distant posts; and did not private expresses set out frequently for their own purposes, of trade usually, to untouched fields, and return safely? Regularly, as well, budgets and furs from all over the North and West reached the Fort. Travel in the wilds was well organized and in the winter was easy and swift.

A letter might arrive from Koominah Koush even

before he, his task completed, would himself arrive with one of those trains of dogs, advancing with great speed over the hard sparkling snow.

For she arranged it thus. Some clear, cold day, not far distant he would come. He would not die. Frequently he had contended with the fiercest obstacles the wilderness could present. Before she had seen him he had frequently escaped death, she was sure. He would escape again. He was to live. It had been so shaped by a higher power. They were to meet. They had met. All things had been against it, yet it had happened.

It was foreordained. All had been made plain to her by a predestined arrangement of letters in a paper, dropping from the sky.

She herself would not die. She had been saved. She had been near death when her two younger sisters had been taken from them, but by a miracle she had lived—to share with Koominah Koush more than immortality.

She would not now accept other prompting than her own in this. And in the end her faith, fighting against time and all its baleful erections, won a magnificent front—at least.

For always, as over the ruins of all woe, she came forth, smiling.

And how simply done! Pray, pray, engage in good deeds, think well at all times. Think well. Dwell on the fact that though so often fatigued, for she worked much harder now than she had ever before been permitted so that her hands were often chafed and bleeding, she had still leisure to walk out in the good air, to which the union of sun and ice gave a most invigorating warmth;

leisure to knit, to embroider, to play with Tim the diminutive game of cats' cradles, to teach him to make his letters on birch bark with a piece of charcoal; many opportunities to sit by the fire (in the midst of much that was ugly) watch the aspiring flames and spin one's own golden arras, of indestructible fibre, yet so delicate that one feared more and more every day to expose it to the view of any other spectator than one's own heart.

Opportunities, too, to chat with mamma of hems, tucks, purling, turning a heel. Mamma talked and advised so cleverly on such matters; opportunity all the while to sing, as one worked; to plot an evening's vivacity. After Pat and Rob had completed their sums and learned their spelling each would relate a jest, each would compose a rhyme.

Tim's jingles were especially droll. Pat and Rob told side-splitting jokes. Don's puns were astonishing. And a very fine game could be played with a button. Once indeed when Tim dropped the button into mamma's hands as if she, too, were playing, she had smiled slightly.

There was no mistaking the mood of her brothers. The irrepressible spirit of youth romped through them. And Margaret's own mood was very like gaiety. She herself would not examine it minutely, would not stop to think, but keep busy surprising, stabbing something that was good, one might say, with a long-handled fork, drawing it in from the farthest field, circumventing it and training one's mind on it.

They were poor, yet rich compared to others. They had still something to give. At times mamma ceased

mumbling to herself. They were in good health. They had a warm house, a fortress that met every breeze that blew without flinching. The severest frost did not alarm. Huge fires sent back a scorching answer to the thumping timbers, to the worst wind roaring in the chimney.

And popping out of bed from under the fur robes where she had been so warm, during a terrible blizzard, raging for hours, rushing hither and thither wrecking all previous snowscape, she was able to reflect that it might still be a fine day. At first the light was thin and pale but shortly from a peephole in the frosted window she glimpsed a band of purest orange in the east below a great weight of clouds, and as she looked those bands of dreariness were infused with scarlet and gold spangles, with garlands of all colours. Sunrises, after all, she was disposed to believe, were most beautiful when there were many clouds.

Sunrises were most beautiful when there were many clouds; and after a storm how beautiful was the world!

Outside in the miraculously quiet morning air, gazing prairieward, she fancied herself looking into a chaste cathedral full of light and new sculptures, and in fancy saw Koominah Koush approaching, on his face the very letters of dedication, so well read by her; as well as the letters of that other law which she knew by heart.

She must wait, wait. Others around her were waiting. It was the chief part of woman. She must think only of blessings, snow, health, food, warmth; while waiting, harpoon from the distance the thought that there had been no crop-destroying flood for several

years, no plague of sickness, no plague of grasshoppers, no such disasters.

Though no incoming express brought any word.

Though Roger MacLachlin did not come over the snow-covered prairie.

If he did not come over the snow-covered prairie, would he not come by the open rivers?

Chapter XXX

One warm day towards the end of February she faced this alternative when the sole topic of family conversation was 'the break-up'. A month or more distant, but its expectation was alarming. Just as soon as the snow began to sag travel over it would cease. Koominah Koush had not come out of the silence, the mystery that still surrounded him, as she had arranged, one clear, cold, bright day over hard snow. Now she saw that foundation losing its firmness, shifting, moving, sinking, finally dissolving, and the land beneath impassable.

He must come by the rivers. The ice thereon must go. One must wait for the 'break-up', with one's magnificent front.

So after a long period of spectral happiness which had in the end much of winter's severity, she began another period of spectral happiness—but much less stoic, shot through by many quicksilver emotions, accompanied by intensive observation of the signs of winter's ending, amounting to a passion itself.

She had welcomed falling leaves and falling fruit. With glad eyes she had seen birds winging south. She had yearned for snow and ice, and all of this had been accorded her in full measure. Now she looked for that fine day in spring when snow and ice would be at an end, when Koominah Koush would journey south by open streams and lakes; when, in his fairy canoe, he

would dash into the colony, over bounding rivers, as he had gone.

With rapture, then, she watched winter, now the arch-enemy, daily giving up a portion of the ghost, a white wall of snow each succeeding day less a wall, a mound less a mound, layers and exposed edges of snow taking on a frail appearance, ridges with sheer glazed borders of eyelet embroidery. With rapture she saw that a whole flat area of snow had become brittle and had fallen into perishable cups, with rapture her eyes met the tops of willows emerging from that sinking sea. As old friends she greeted bare branches on the river banks, no longer angelic wings but plain empty boughs. It was a gay thing when water oozed from the roof, when a load of snow slid to the ground. And when the huge icicle formed by many drippings, which she had watched from the window it decorated, growing longer and longer and fatter and fatter, fell and shattered to pieces, her laughter united with the crash of its destruction and with Timothy's childish glee.

It was a matter for humour, too, when she could no longer take one step out of the house, so deep was the slush in every direction. Could not one see from the window panes so well now, see Luke with an air of great content sitting among a scattering of very clean bones, both reminiscent of meat more thoroughly enjoyed than the long season of fish and forecasting another season of meat. All one could see from the windows. Water on the ice in the river! Another crack! A row of bubbles oozing up. And when a large black patch on the opposite bank all at once one day came in

view, the first patch of the old earth visible for months she stared at it fully an hour, fascinated.

The first patch of black earth! Reality thrusting itself from spirituality, ghosts, spectres. Reality giving itself an airing, that was all. She caught her breath, reflecting that after all this patch was a sign of the worst of all periods at hand, a period of weeks when there would be no travel whatever in and out of the colony, when it would be as closed to the world, civilized or uncivilized, as a settlement in another planet. Weeks when no trains of dogs would leave for various posts, when no expresses would 'cast up,' when no brigade of boats would come or go, when there was little visiting in the colony, when errands of business or pleasure were confined within a narrow radius, when there was no firm snow and the rotting river-ice was unsafe as highway, bridge or stream.

A sluggish period, chafing active spirits greatly. The boys, much inside, wrestling and contesting over trifles, littered the house. Don impatient, while mud and water moiled about on the prairie, talking of laying down his crops, twice the area of the previous year. Roofs still damp and uninhabitable, robins arriving, fussing and scolding and finding no place to lay an egg. Across the way great unrest. The *Métis* talking, fussing, complaining, discussing the next hunt, the next voyage, neither of which could be indulged in for weeks, with acrimony.

Unspent energy all about, moods of the senses in the air, consumed herself with passionate watching, Margaret was in danger of losing what happiness she had,

what spectral happiness. One day she nearly lost it under a great lassitude, when the force she had been putting forth to endure the passage of time left her, when damaging thoughts attacked her. Was her hope built upon nothing, a mountain erected by fancy alone? Had she piled errors endlessly on top of her first great error, until she could no longer see anything as it should be seen?

What knowledge, if any, lay buried in her mother, in the dust and ashes of her spirit? Her skin as colourless as faded poplar leaves on the ground. All winter long pressing hard on the heels of bright thoughts—Margaret had avoided notice of her mother. But this morning in an excessive weariness, when a strong new light burst into the room, she noted her mother's despair, her slackness. Dust on the ledges, ashes about the hearth, a clutter of utensils at the back unwashed. The boys had gone to school. Don was outside. Breakfast was over. Benches stood about. Everything disarranged and soiled, Tim, dirty, hacking away at a stick with a table knife.

In a moment her mother, sitting listlessly in the chair, would bestir herself and they would resume the daily routine. In a moment they would gather strength. Her mother, fatigued—for what reason? In another pitiless light, her skin dry and pale as straw, with the hard glimmer of straw, and her eyes, once she looked up, burnt holes in the straw.

Disenchantment suddenly rushed at Margaret, disenchantment complete. In alarm, feeling its approach, she sprang up, went to the door and flung it open, to a glorious morning, and all eyes, pathetic herself, she re-

ceived in her face the full force of the melting air. Into the very core of the sun her heart crept and drew vigour, her pale cheeks won the tints of fleshy pink blossoms, a balm fell on her dry lips, they trembled and fluted softly out to that subtle moisture in the air, and into her eyes came the gospel of the trees, stronger, less visionary, bearing sticky moist buds, assured of their verdure, of things unseen below the ground, of the ground so wet and loving its wetness, the earth itself an animal drinking, of the black and white river, of slopes so human and homely. So much of flesh and blood in the making. All the monadic revelations of winter pierced through by something dual so that she stretched out her hands into the air as if to deprive a hero at the top of his spire of some of his loftiest dedication, to destroy whole areas of his unselfishness.

Faith. A different faith, beginning to sprout some of the substance of carnate spring. He would return—but not for days. No human being could travel by land or water for days. It was not possible. But he would come when the rivers were free, when the ice battles were over, when the floes ceased going down, when the boys perhaps first used the river for purposes of the bath, when the red-stemmed willows glowed freshly, when the first delicate awns spring up, when the plains offering up a perfect green like a prayer were answered by a shower of mauve and gold crocuses; he would come, the great explorer, the deathless hero with whom she would share more than immortality.

Then and not until then. She must be patient. Patient.

But this morning, though she had been so long drilled in this great virtue, it eluded her. The whole world, indeed, seemed keyed up to the vast excitement that all at once possessed her, so that even the pattering feet of little Tim in the room behind her had the tempo of a great adventure.

The great adventure!

Chapter XXXI

A YOUNG man stood before her, gravely removing a tattered cap.

Startled, white as death, Margaret turned helpless eyes on her mother now beside her at the open door. Was this a vision? Was this a being from another world? The face so worn, the eyes so haunting and the voice seeming to come shattered and hollow from a distance.

'Pardon me if I frighten you.'

'Oh, it is—it is——?' No, it was not merely a voice clothed in shadowy garments and shadowy flesh. Not merely a vision, resembling Koominah Koush, but Koominah Koush himself. The raven hair, the sun shining on it giving it those glints, the poise 'like a pine tree'. 'It is—you! Oh, how did you come?'

'By dog sled to within a hundred miles—from there on foot,' the voice explained, the last word a mere whisper.

'Walked?' both mother and daughter exclaimed aghast, looking down at his moccasins, fragments of moccasins.

'Come in, sir, and rest,' Elizabeth Moore commanded sternly.

He entered, great physical weariness in his movements, yet below that and below a strange other-worldliness, the freshness of all living things and of eternal purpose.

They brought food and drink and when he had partaken of these sparingly, the woman asked abruptly. 'Your name, sir? Your face is familiar, yet we do not know you.'

Margaret gasped and would have spoken but the gaunt visitor rose, bowed and himself answered. 'Roger MacLachlin, madam. I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance some months ago, previously having met Miss Moore.'

'Oh, indeed,' still not remembering. 'And what is it brought you to this state?'

'I have just returned, madam, from a lengthy journey. I left last summer to join an expedition following in the footsteps of Sir John Franklin.'

'Did you not read in the newspaper, mamma? A great and noble mission,' Margaret murmured.

'Ah!' suddenly recollecting, 'you followed the brigade? You went at the same time as my husband?'

'I did indeed.'

'You have—you have,' she stammered, 'a message from him.'

'I regret, madam, I have not. I last saw him when he left us at Grassy Point.'

'Oh, he is gone—he is gone,' she said dully.

'No doubt he will return, madam, when the rivers are navigable.'

'We are confident of it,' Margaret said.

'He is gone—he is gone——'

'I regret that I can give you no information, madam. I did not know that he had not long since returned. I wish myself to see him, but since——' he moved

towards the door, 'this morning I shall not encroach further on your hospitality.'

Margaret accompanied him to the door. There before he left, exchanged a few words with him in low tones, then turned and faced her mother whom her superbly conscious expression at first stunned, then inflamed violently.

'You—you'll not marry that man,' she cried in wrath.

'Oh, mamma—mamma—you need not—oh, mamma, he has not declared himself——' Margaret said weakly.

'Declared himself! Declared himself! Haven't I eyes? Oh, I see now—I see now. All the time—all the time. It is of him—you have—you have——' in an excess of rage words failed her.

'But mamma, there is no need——' in the excess of her consternation that her mother should object, her totally unforeseen objection, in the excess of mortification at having so delicate a secret shouted from the housetops, Margaret could not speak.

'You'll not marry that man,' her mother said in lower but terribly ominous tones. 'Your father is away but you'll do what I tell you, young lady. You'll marry Colin Currie. Haven't I slaved? Haven't I worn my fingers to the bone—and who—is—this—this wandering dog?'

'Mamma,' Margaret flashed back deepest indignation, 'I shall use my own discretion.'

'Your discretion! Your discretion! Who ever told you —you—that you had discretion. Who is this—this—person—put for a moment in a place of—importance—then off. Who is he, I say?' she demanded. 'How do you know anything about him? Who is he?' she shouted.

Distraught, keyed herself to the highest pitch yet determined Margaret opened her mouth to meet her mother's violent speech, when Don burst in like a hurricane, waving the last issue of the newspaper. 'News—news——' he announced at the top of his lungs. 'Listen listen.' Holding one arm aloft he read importantly:

'Roger MacLachlin has returned, we are pleased to be able to record, safe and sound, from the lonely wastes of the North, from barbarous spectacles, from many disasters, lack of food, misadventures of every sort, from the depths of Arctic solitude. We are pleased beyond measure. We are honoured in being able to announce, too, the great news that our distinguished friend himself has found another document left in a cairn by Sir John Franklin, another page of inestimable value, another page of glory, focusing the eyes of the world on Mr. MacLachlin.

'We are indeed happy to be able to record this great achievement. Our only regret is that it will not be possible for Mr. MacLachlin to resume the position he has so ably filled at the Fort. It is his intention, we are informed on good authority, to which is added a romantic whisper, to make his headquarters again in the wilds at Fort —— there to re-enter the service of the Company in which his family has been for generations and thence seek out new channels of trade among the Indians in regions not yet explored. Such is the purpose, we believe, of this scion of a noble trans-atlantic—family.' Don stumbled over the words then broke off.

'I'd like to see that page. I saw his map—and by gum I'd like to see that page—that page of glory.'

'So would I—and what—what society would you have at Fort——? the mother assailed her daughter again, in a manner only a trifle less severe than before. 'That will settle you, my lady. You would have to travel a thousand miles or more. You—brought up as you have been—and when you were there—what society would you have——?'

'I shall have the society of my husband.'

'Your husband, Mag? Your husband?' Don began to jump about excitedly.

'You be quiet, will you? Esquimaux, and other wanderings dogs. I say—you—know nothing of it.'

'I shall use my own discretion.' Margaret tried to say this with quiet firmness but fury of a sort never aroused in her before trembled in her voice, a terrible fury, pitted against tyranny.

'What is wrong with Colin Currie, tell me that?'

'He is not here,' Don said in a tone of joy.

'What has this to do with you?' turning fiercely to Margaret again. 'What is wrong with Colin Currie, I say?'

'Roger MacLachlin is different.'

'How different? Colin Currie will be nicely educated—and their mothers are the same—and Mistress Currie is not low-thoughted.'

'Roger MacLachlin is different. He is wise. He is brave. His heart is as the heart of the reindeer. His speech is like good water,' Margaret declared in ringing tones.

'Pshaw! Piffle! You—you—if he did find that page—who knows?'

'He did, he did,' Don declared. 'It says so here. It

says so here. A page of glory——' Don slapped the paper and began to read again.

'That's enough from you, be quiet—and enough from you, my lady—you and your gibberish. Go to your room. You will do as I tell you.'

'I shall,' Margaret began and ended this time in deadly, quiet tones, 'use my own discretion—as you taught me—as papa taught me.'

'But when——?' The memory then dawned on her. She appeared for a moment nonplussed. 'Go to your room,' she muttered, her eyes hard.

In her room Margaret spent the remainder of the day and the night, at first indignant, hurt, then soon in rapturous resolve, leaping as do the long downtrodden when shoving aside the foot, to the extreme of self-determination. She would go away with him. To-morrow he was coming—to declare himself. All that long day she remained in her room, a prisoner but with bounding heart, envisaging a future, indifferent finally to everything else.

She would go away with him on a long, long journey. She saw herself taking leave. She was in a boat and he was beside her. Both were attired well in the mode. Roger was wearing a long-skirted, tight-waisted coat and a tall silk hat—she was wearing a plaid silk taffeta. She arranged all the details of their costumes. She had plenty of time. She saw herself viewing scenes that would live always in her memory. Fort Garry with its high stone walls, the whitewashed houses, windmills —saying good-bye to all—to the sky, the sky of her youth with its own distinction—to the river, to her own river

—saying good-bye to her own river—saying good-bye to her mother (coming to this part of her picture Margaret felt somewhat subdued)—to her mother dignified and stately, standing at the landing—they would go with a brigade—drawing about her the shawl of ceremony—garment no longer of a recluse perhaps——?

For might not—would not mamma have realized by that time—that the marriage which seemed to interfere with mamma's cherished ambition to re-enter the first society of the settlement would in reality gain her easy access to it—for did not the newspaper hint, more than hint at the fact that the family of Roger MacLachlin was of the hierarchy of the Company to whom all doors were open?

Her marriage would help mamma, in a way she herself had not thought of until this moment. Mamma therefore would be different. She would engage in neighbourly deeds as of old, she would attend to the ways of her household, she would still assist Donovan in every way. At night perhaps her thoughts would fall away into a mist—if papa did not return—and she would gather from that greyness, something—one did not know that. Margaret seemed to see her mother thus—but behind it all her curious ambition—not desiccated after years of poverty and neglect, but lying all the while in some imperishable solution.

Margaret would be saying good-bye to her, to them all, to Don triumphant, her sudden ally, champion of the rights of a new generation, but triumphant on his own account. Don was to have his wish. The infallible newspaper reported that a steamboat would come in the

summer from the States, was even now being made ready, reported also, which unaccountably also pleased him, that a tide of travel would set in from the east and south such as the colony had never known before. 'Canadians' were coming in great numbers it was said—and there were rumours, too, that before long the great fur Company would not be first in authority in the country, rather Canada itself.

That was rather disturbing—if anything could be disturbing.

She came back to her picture. Everyone would be saying good-bye. As a final touch, Angus Currie would come near to the boat to say to her 'before ye gang away Maggie to the ither side of the plains, let me tell ye ye hae marrit a guid mon'.

That would be the last spoken good-bye. Colin Currie would not be in evidence however nicely educated, nor Simone, but perhaps Fanny laughing and chatting in a nicely educated manner to Donovan. In honour of the great explorer and his bride, the guns would boom out, a parting salute, the boats, highly decorated, would move out amid clamorous farewells, the *voyageurs* would plunge into song; and then they would be gone on their long journey over rivers, through the prairie a thousand miles or more to that 'lake of living water'—'where the great plains look up to the high hills'—Koominah Koush and the pale princess, the Lily of Fort Garry, his bride.

Blurs now and again in the picture, blurs of a half-an-hour or so at a time, in which the lover played the chief part, in which she saw with difficulty even the

one triumphant gold thread, when the victor was not standing at the loftiest point of dedication but a rung or two lower down dedicated to her.

So the long day of her imprisonment passed—and the night; in alternate pictures and blurs.

Chapter XXXII

THERE was fresh snow in the morning on a hardened ground, on trees, in the air, speeding about like white veils on the sunlit breezes. The first change in the weather in months for which Margaret had not watched occurred during the night, the first drop in temperature with which her spirits did not drop in unison, rather rose. The long, hard winter was gone, as was her long hard stress. Winter was merely thus hallowed in passing by new fairy forms, as was her past by her imprisoned dreams overnight, by the crystal clear images in her mind this morning.

'I trust that you see this morning the error of your decision,' her mother spoke coldly.

Margaret caught at 'decision'. What infinitesimal fraction of doubt of any sort lay in her, vanished. 'I see no error, mamma,' she declared with assurance, with an air of maturity even, as if her marriage were already accomplished, whereas, while Koominah Koush had in a few words at the door revealed almost too much, he had still to beg, crave, sue, entreat and implore.

'You will live to regret it.'

'I have done, mamma, as I think best.'

'What a strange unthankfulness for all I have taught you,' her mother lamented.

'You taught me to use my own discretion,' Margaret insisted.

'All I have done for my children—I have done everything for my children—I, alone,' Elizabeth Moore mourned, with much simple sincerity in her tones.

'Oh, mamma, mamma,' Margaret exclaimed, the old sorrow piercing her momentarily. 'Papa is alive. I know it. I feel it. He is alive.'

'Better not. Better—if he had been put to bed with a shovel.'

'Some day he will come,' Margaret continued in a rapture, oblivious to the intent of her mother's speech. 'Some day he will come, mamma, when you are least expecting him and all your dullness will leave you and you all will be made happy once more by his bright presence. Oh, mamma, mamma,' she addressed the skies, 'papa wishes so much to obtain money for you.'

'Does he indeed?'

'I am sure of it—and possibly—possibly our uncle will come with him.'

'I do not wish to see him—nor your father, either—the dirty——'

One could not repeat that—most difficult to understand, so difficult to excuse in mamma. No daughter, indeed, but one capable of infinite illusion, no daughter who had not already withstood so much harsh and vulgar prose, no maiden perhaps but one greatly in love and loved, but would have been completely undone to her mother's last indictment.

It was so difficult for mamma to bear the crushing burden of loneliness—as it was for papa, night after night still out on the plains establishing his lonely bivouac.

'I shall find out about this—this man, myself,' her mother said suddenly, and as suddenly prepared herself and went out over the hard ground, with Tim, breaking her long seclusion. 'Mistress Denny will know.'

Left alone in the house, Margaret moved about swiftly putting the room in order. If he would come—now—it would be—— She sped about from this to that, her heart beating wildly, running to the window, looking out on the snow, speeding about in the sunlight, shimmering bridal veils, pausing in her tasks, beyond the ritual of neatness even, in her room beyond the ritual of a complete and perfect toilet, almost beyond all ritual.

Roger MacLachlin came in whole garments and fine, but on his face still the expression of one who has lived long in the medium of great restraint and endurance.

'You have suffered greatly, sir,' Margaret said faintly.

He appeared slightly astonished. 'I am accustomed to the life I have been living—not on that account—but on another. You thought of me during my absence?' he challenged abruptly.

Margaret was not surprised that he should ask such a question, but his manner of charging it with so much force and defiance rendered her quite inarticulate. She who had been feeling so much for so long, suddenly saw all her throbbings, past and present, about to be grasped, enveloped, vanquished.

'You thought of me during my absence?' he challenged again, with even greater force. Margaret could raise neither a murmur nor an eyelid.

'Let me tell you my story,' this lord of the wilds, this personified defiance, though still so careworn, so exhausted, began with a massive calm—barely began, halted—to throttle some emotion other than defiance—went on. 'I came to ask permission to pay my addresses to you. One night—last summer——'

'One night—what night, sir?'

'You do not remember? You do not remember? he demanded. 'It was moonlight. You were dancing alone. I came in my canoe. I climbed the bank. I stood among the trees—watching you for some time, unseen. I made to advance. You heard me. You saw me. You sped away from me.'

'I sped away from you?'

'I saw your look of strong dislike—the flash of scorn. You despised me.'

'I despised you!'

'I had imagined differently. Far off in my former home I heard of a Lily—a beautiful eastern Lily. I heard, indifferent to your sex. I came east. I saw you and all my previous plans, all my previous thoughts, were wiped out when the possibility of a greater happiness than I had hitherto imagined could ever come to me, shone out on me from your blue eyes. For days I dreamed only of you—and at last I dared to approach you. You spurned me.

'I could not forget the curling scorn, the contempt concentrated in your one glance, and in deepest bitterness I slipped away, resolved to live—if living were necessary—elsewhere. But once again after weeks of indecision, during which time I harboured often the

hope that I might have erred, I made bold to approach you again. Once more I came in my canoe. Once more I reached the trees. Once more you were without, and once more, on seeing me, with a flash of scorn, of utter distaste you turned and fled.'

'Oh, sir——'

'Hear me, I beg of you. That was the end. The McWare party were urging my assistance. I made ready to go. At the last moment, on that last day, I imagined your attitude different. I imagined everything. I was in torture—but at the last moment I fled to join the party —I knew well the route.'

'It was your duty to go,' Margaret said with low earnestness.

What nobility, what courage, what grandeur of soul he kept in the background! With some trepidation she wondered, would she be able to meet his heroic fire and that hardness of fibre which so controlled it, would she be able, that is, to share his whole life?

'Now I have returned. It is my good fortune to find you alive.

'I imagined you dead.'

'Dead—me dead?'

'Or worse—the wife of——'

'Wife of——?

'Colin Currie. His settled infatuation I knew—his position in the colony.'

'But sir—indeed, sir.'

'I have been the prey of torment, of uncertainty which I can no longer tolerate. Many, I know, have begged your hand. And I the least of them.' He came

over and knelt beside her and, supplicating, looked into her face.

As on a previous occasion, she was frightened; for herself now, as well as for the supplicant. The deep propriety of sixteen than which there is none deeper, the respect for that Rule of Conduct which said that the first advances of even a favoured suitor should be received with a degree of coldness she saw in jeopardy.

'Am I the least of these?'

She remained embattled in silence.

'I have returned hurriedly. I have waited long.' He swayed towards her 'like a pine tree.' Huskiness masked his voice. Hard-won restraint was failing him. Formality was trembling in the balance, tottering—fell, in a fashion, to a sudden deluge of words.

Rising from before her, he strode up and down the room, delivering them at white heat. Could wait no longer—wished to know her feelings now—not the custom of her people perhaps (a thought which appeared to enrage him still more), but he must know—must know, his life depended on it. His life—his soul—his manhood. He must know *her* feeling—could no longer endure.

Gliding about the room he bombarded her with hard, hot, flying, broken phrases, from every corner; fragments from a leaping emotion.

Timidly at last Margaret dared to look up and his startling luminous glance attacking her, stunned her even more than his words. Unsteadily she walked backwards to the chair from which she had risen and still under fire, gazed at him in wan wonder.

Was this a declaration—in a fashion? Truly she had not fancied——!

Had she thought of him at all during his absence? Again he pressed on her this question.

'Once'—she hesitated—confessed brokenly.

'Once!' he cried—confronted her—took both her hands—crushed them in his, threw them away, and, stalking about the room, smote his breast. Yesterday he had thought—he had thought—he could endure the suspense no longer—no longer. Her last look at the Fort—he had taken away with him and lived with it—all these months—and every formal little word she had ever spoken to him—each a drop of nectar——

Did she know that, he now entreated abjectly—and that every day and every hour he had seen her eyes—and heard her voice—shivering the air like silver magic—and away—far, far away—in the deep solitudes—everything told him of her—waters—trees—snow—the snow, the pure, white snow. At night going through the deep woods she was the lonely star above the trees. She was in the dawn, in the sunrise, in the morning air——

Swiftly flowing now, the words came from him, all the eloquence and exuberance of his Indian nature behind them. This morning—even—all the birds had awakened him, shouting in a chorus of her.

Since yesterday—as if in sheer weariness he now stood still and proffered in tones of complete fatigue—since yesterday he had feared he would be dead before he saw her again.

He had feared some influence against him—over

night—though at last—at the last moment—oh, he must be forever sure of what he thought—he had seen in her eyes yesterday—must be forever sure. He had fought to forget—her—what right had he—an Indian—he had none of the appearance of his father's people—by all the white gods—what right—what right?

Dropping on his knees before her, he threw up his arms, they fell to his side, limply—and he was mute, with bowed head.

'Ah, sir,' Margaret, in great distress, spoke over him. 'I wished to tell you—I have long wished to tell you—that night—I did not see a face—nor form—both nights I made a mistake—I—I—thought it was someone else—whom I did not like——'

'You made a mistake? You did not *know* it was I? You made a mistake? Someone else you did not like?' He lifted his head abruptly and his hoarse demands swept her. 'Then you mean—you mean?' The polish of his duskiness gleamed before her, his startling luminous eyes pierced her more penetratingly than before. 'Tell me,' he urged in joy—straining towards her, lifting his arms—then dropping them suddenly.

For suddenly she was trembling violently. Violently—with closed eyes—blinded by—something. After having been tossed about on the billows of wild words, the declaration of a madman, a stricken madman, she was about to capitulate—as weakly and as completely as any untutored maid—to some vaster reality, it might be, than she could look in the face, to a greater dazzling light.

With shut eyes she sat and shivered.

Dismayed, with a fixed gaze Koominah Koush regarded her, a fragile lily quaking before him, and, drawing away from her, stammered out in slow agony: 'She —is afraid of me. She is afraid of me—still. She may not have told me—the truth? I am different—my skin —my eyes—I am an Indian—and I have acted like one—I have frightened her. She cannot look at me—even—I will go away—I will go away,' he mumbled with a sob, rising and walking away, the tragedy of deep pride moving through him, contorting his face, that pride which had suddenly caused him to leave an old-world city, where he could not walk abroad without each and all turning to look, to exclaim 'An Indian—an Indian!'

Going over to a bench where lay his tall, silk hat, taking it up, clenching it fiercely as it were itself the gloomy destiny of all his race, the dark symbol of inevitable defeat, he walked towards the door.

Margaret shot up. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, took a few steps towards him, hesitated, halted—put her hands over her face.

The hands clenching the glossy hat relaxed, the hat fell to the floor unnoticed, while its possessor watched the quivering form of the girl. For a long time in silence. The only sound from without, the warm moaning of the wind, surging through the spring snow, whirling it about the house, weaving iridescent veils.

At last with a sigh he stole over to her—from pride to light—a radiance on his face. 'What is it? Do not be afraid. Tell me—I—shall not touch you.' Yet even at the moment of his promise he took one of her hands

from her face—and, as if forgetting everything but the hand, laid it on one of his for reverent examination. The miracle of it, so white, so marvellously formed—so helpless!

And the miracle of its lying on his. Quietly and tranquilizing.

'I cannot go away. I cannot go away. I was dissembling—but I have been too—I shall not force myself again—I shall not force myself!' he crooned, while drawing her hand and arm slowly, subtly, towards him until she stood securely within the bend of his arm.

'You are not afraid now?' With the kindness of a father, he looked down on her.

She looked up, slightly startled, questioning, then down again.

'Too—too good—too beautiful,' he breathed, gazing on her, with famished eyes—in adoration of her fairness so closely viewed—in his possession—in his peaceable possession. But all at once dropped the arm that lightly clasped her and stepping aside, stood statuesque and solitary, with head bent over, for a long time, until at last realizing that her eyes had fluttered over to him, in apprehension, he moved beside her again and casually restoring his arm spoke with every semblance of calm, in the manner of the very fine gentleman that he was (to quote, indirectly, the rector—for the last time).

'I regret exceedingly—whatever it is—has kept us apart. It may have been your mistake—it may have been mine—I—I—I have been too tempestuous—at least—but I must confess to you what you may have already divined. I care for you a great deal. That is I love you.

The truth of the matter is I have loved you since first I saw you—and I would not alarm you for the world. I believe I am almost wholly civilized—and I would be grateful if you would consent to unite your life with mine? More than grateful.'

Immediately thereupon Margaret gave her consent, the great explorer of Arctic solitudes having fulfilled at last all the conditions of courtship and having finally adopted, whether by accident or design the posture in proposing approved of by her Academy, one arm about the waist, pressing lightly, full of grace.

The time had arrived. Perhaps, too, she was not altogether deceived by Koominah Koush's sudden assumption of complete composure and gentleness, may have indeed feared a swift return of his previous suffering (and delirium!) from the quickening eyes and twisted smile bent down on her. At any rate without more ado and quite simply she told him: 'I love you dearly, sir—and would go to the end of the world with you.'

So it came about that they went to the end of the world together, where they dwelt ever afterwards beside a lake of living water.

Colophon

On the shore of a northern lake is the site of an old Indian mission where sometimes picnicers gather, where at times the screech of a locomotive may be heard, a trail of smoke seen in the sky—from the locomotive or from the not far distant city, casting off the dull vapours of its industry. One is not long allowed to forget the great metropolis of the Canadian West even in this quiet spot, where are so few signs of the life that animated it a hundred years ago. The pretty little cabins are all gone, the neat fences. Erstwhile supports rotted on the ground alone bear evidence of a church. Of an early, vigorously prosecuted effort to teach Indians to till the ground, to live in houses, there are few signs; more of the church; and of the effort to teach them Christian burial, a few wooden slabs not altogether crumbled to the dust they seek to commemorate, and a few stones.

On one of the latter a picnicer on the ground for the first time idly deciphered the inscription:

'Sacred to the Memory of Samuel Moore
1785-1855
beloved husband of Sally, daughter of
Chief Wessagun'

and slightly astonished, turned to a fellow reveller munching a sandwich nearby, and heard from her (who

knew from her grandmother) something of the brother of this Samuel (very little known of Samuel except as here recorded) Robert Moore who was always going away in search of this brother, finally of himself never returning—jolly rascal—speculations, oh, yes—vagueness about all his absences.

Something of the eldest son, most successful, the first brilliant optimist of the West—the city covers a large part of his farm. Something of Fanny Currie—the original dispenser of Western breezes. Something of the Lily herself for whom so much was sacrificed at home—a perfect lily—toiled not nor spun—who chose her own husband—something of a victory in her day—every age has its victories—who was so meek—but who inherited the earth while on it—after upsetting it. 'The meek they shall upset the earth,' would be better. At any rate she broke countless hearts when she took that long journey with her dusky husband, that long, hard journey across the plains—so long undiscovered as to prove, surely, undiscoverable—to some point of devastating crudity—it was thought—after Fort Garry—she of all people, a lass certainly with a delicate air.

Something, too, of the old days when pemmican was in its prime—of the old colony on the meeting waters, rivers of light, which came to be, after weathering many disasters, so prosperous a settlement, with a simple idiom of its own, which had reached a certain perfection in its pride and peace when it was swept away by war of a sort—and by the coming of Canadians.

THE END

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